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## Accounting Careers, Winter 1992

American Institute of Certified Public Accountants (AICPA)

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# ACCOUNTING CAREERS

Winter 1992

CPAs and the environment:

## ***Opportunities growing in areas of compliance auditing; litigation***

As businesses take greater interest in environmental issues, CPA firms have been getting involved in everything from environmental compliance audits and systems and procedures audits to handling claims and disputes.

Randy Hale, manager of the environmental management services practice for Arthur Andersen's (AA) Houston office, says utilities, manufacturers, and chemical companies are particularly affected by environmental issues. Companies in these fields are increasingly using CPA services to either set up a "preventive" system to ensure compliance and avoid future claims or disputes, or to provide assistance once legal implications have arisen.

AA's environmental management services practice is involved in the preventive side; that is, to assist companies in developing a comprehensive compliance program. "We look at the company's organizational structure to make sure it has the proper resources and personnel in place to effectively run a compliance program," Hale explains.

The practice concentrates on both environmental compliance audits and systems and procedures audits, which Hale says are two different things. "A compliance audit is from an engineering perspective," he explains. Basically, an engineer visits an operating location or plant and makes sure that site is in "physical" compliance with the laws applicable to its processes.

While the environmental compliance audit is a "snapshot," the systems and procedures audit looks at the "big picture," Hale says. It entails incorporating the proper organizational structure,

procedures and controls, and training programs to make sure all of a company's facilities are operating effectively and in compliance with applicable statutes.

Accounting students interested in getting into the litigation side of environmental issues may want to consider a position with a firm involved in handling claims and disputes. Barbara Duganier, a partner in the litigation services practice in AA's Houston office, says individuals there get involved in all phases of the dispute process. For example, AA's litigation services team has been working for Exxon concerning the damage assessment on the Valdez oil spill. AA has assisted Exxon in analyzing a large number of claims that resulted from the spill.

Duganier notes that environmental cases often takes years before they get to court and they involve large volumes of documents. "A big part of the job involves capturing information from these documents in databases which will serve the needs of the attorneys as the litigation progresses," she says.

"It's very diversified," Duganier says of her work. "It's challenging to work with attorneys, and it's exciting to hear the verdict in a case you were a part of — especially when you win."

Robert Half International, Menlo Park, California, places CPAs nationwide who specialize in handling environmental claims and disputes. Terry Storevik, national placement director for litigation support services in Robert Half's San Diego office, says CPA involvement in the environmental area has grown substantially in the past few years. He

attributes this to an increase in suits concerning issues like waste management and groundwater pollution.

College students interested in specializing in an accounting career in the environmental area are encouraged to take environmental management courses. Storevik notes that an increasing number of schools now offer degrees in environmental issues. A recommended course load should include classes on the U.S. regulatory structure and statistics. "Much of the work involves gathering statistical, historical facts and doing projections of cost data," he says.

After graduating, the ideal path would be to get a position with a CPA firm or consulting firm and work on environmental engagements, Storevik explains. He says most of the larger CPA firms and an increasing number of regional and local firms are involved in the environmental area in some context, although he notes that most firms dealing in litigation services are looking for people with experience. One option outside of public practice is to get experience with a utility or a company in the energy field, Storevik adds.

Duganier says that AA tends to prefer CPAs with a couple of years of auditing experience before moving them into the litigation services practice. She says a lot of the traits indigenous to auditing, such as investigatory skills, are necessary for this type of work. On the other hand, AA's environmental management services practice hires individuals directly into the field, according to Hale. Prior to his present position, Hale says he spent several years in AA's audit practice focusing primarily on the waste industry.

"It's an exciting area and an exclusive area," Storevik says of the environmental field. "As individuals acquire experience, they will be worth a lot on the open market."

**FOCUS ON:**

# **Tony Jackson, Olympics Controller**

**T**ony Jackson, CPA, is the controller for the Atlanta Committee for the Olympic Games (ACOG), which are scheduled to be held in the summer of 1996. An employee of ACOG since May, Tony has worked in various segments of the profession: in industry, in public practice for a large firm, in public practice for a small firm, and in non-profit. Tony graduated in 1977 with a BBA in accounting from Howard University in Washington, D.C. He was interviewed by John Daidone, editor of Accounting Careers and a manager in the Academic and Career Development Division.



**DAIDONE:** *The Olympics are one of the most important and highly recognized events worldwide—both politically and socially. What is it like working in this environment?*

**JACKSON:** It's a great opportunity. It's not often that the Olympics come into your life. In addition to this being the 100-year anniversary of the Modern Games, it will also be the first time the Games will be held in the south. Southerners have a lot of pride and want to showcase these Games as the best.

**DAIDONE:** *As controller for the Games, what are some of your responsibilities?*

**JACKSON:** I am basically responsible for all of the treasury management and financial reporting for the Games. On the treasury side, I will be working with a budget of \$1.2 billion. My financial reporting duties include the general ledger, payroll, and accounts payable.

**DAIDONE:** *Aside from your everyday duties, do you have any immediate priorities you need to address?*

**JACKSON:** Actually, I need to select and implement a better computerized accounting system than the one I presently have. I also need to develop accounting policies and procedures and hire competent and highly motivated staff.

**DAIDONE:** *What about the long range? How do you see your job evolving as the '96 Olympics draw near?*

**JACKSON:** Basically, what I'm doing now is "rolling up my sleeves" and doing the work myself. Starting in 1992, I will be managing a staff that will do the work. During 1996, I'm planning to establish four to five accounting offices throughout the metropolitan Atlanta area and in Savannah [where the yachting event will take place] to provide accounting support to the 27 sporting events and other activity groups (e.g., broadcasting, merchandising, concessions). This could involve having about 35 people working under me.

**DAIDONE:** *What are the some of the benefits of working for ACOG?*

**JACKSON:** I guess the biggest benefit is the opportunity to make so many international contacts. Also, I will be involved in a lot of diverse activities which I ordinarily would not be able to do working for one organization.

**DAIDONE:** *Any drawbacks?*

**JACKSON:** I wouldn't call it a drawback, but since this is a new organization, there are no procedures in place. This could be frustrating for some people, but I enjoy working with "startups." I am in an environment where I can be very creative.

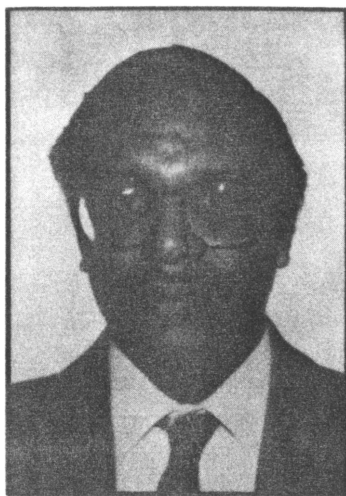
**DAIDONE:** *What will happen to your position once the Summer Games are over?*

**JACKSON:** We're expecting a shutdown phase that could last from six months to two years. My department will be the last to leave since we'll need to file the final reports and dispose of all remaining assets.

**DAIDONE:** *The Los Angeles Olympics were a major commercial success and contributed substantially to the city's economy. How are the Olympic Games affecting Atlanta now, and what do you foresee in the next four years?*

**JACKSON:** Presently, Atlanta ranks very high in quality of life and atmosphere for business growth. I see this rating improving even more now that the Olympics have been awarded to the city. There will be tremendous construction in the surrounding areas for the Games. Many more companies will be moving their headquarters here, and there will be a lot of development in industrial parks and housing.

**DAIDONE:** *Before joining ACOG, you had a very diverse career path. Could you describe how you got from Point A to B?*



**JACKSON:** My first job was in public practice as a staff accountant with Arthur Andersen in New Orleans. I worked for the firm for two years, then went to Atlanta and joined a small CPA firm, Banks, Finley, White & Company. After working two years there, I decided to go the corporate accounting route. I got a job as accounting manager at Cable America in Atlanta, and I worked my way up to assistant con-

troller at one of Cable America's subsidiaries, Cable DeKalb [now known as Prime Cable]. The company was sold to a cable company out of Texas which at the time didn't need any additional CPAs. Subsequently, I accepted a position with Air Atlanta, the first black-run airline in America.

**DAIDONE:** *What did you do at Air Atlanta?*

**JACKSON:** I started out as accounting manager and worked my way up to controller. I worked there for three years until the airline went bankrupt in April 1987. I really enjoyed working for the airline so it was very disappointing when it folded. In July 1987, I was hired as controller for the Underground Festival Development Company, developers of the festival marketplace in downtown Atlanta. I stayed there until the project was built in 1989. From there, I was hired as vice president of finance for H.J. Russell & Company, a construction and real estate company which happens to be the fourth largest black business in America. I stayed with H.J. Russell until May of this year, when the opportunity with the Olympics became available.

**DAIDONE:** *Having worked in public practice, industry, and now, non-profit, how would you compare these different segments of accounting?*

**JACKSON:** Public accounting was a good experience, and I feel that anyone wanting to become a CPA should get experience, preferably with a Big 6 firm. The thing that bothered me about public practice was that most of the engagements I worked on had short completion dates, so as a result, I never had the time to get an in-depth understanding of the operations of the companies.

**DAIDONE:** *Did you find corporate accounting more to your liking?*

**JACKSON:** Yes. I had enough time to understand the operations of the companies and really impact "the bottom line." For example, with the airlines, I got an understanding of aircraft maintenance and ticketing operations, which enabled me to better manage the financial resources for those functions. I feel now that I am a well-rounded financial manager vs. being just an accountant.

**DAIDONE:** *What about non-profit?*

**JACKSON:** I find non-profit to be very similar to corporate accounting. Like the Olympic Games, most of the companies I was associated with were basically start-ups. I would have to create financial systems, hire people, and develop strategies to solve problems. I was able to see all the phases of the organization.

**DAIDONE:** *Throughout your career path, did you have any mentors to guide you?*

**JACKSON:** Actually, just about every job I've had in Atlanta the person in charge has been my mentor. The partner in charge at Banks, Finley, White & Company was my first mentor [he was also the first black manager at Arthur Andersen in Atlanta]. Mitch Martin [a member of the AICPA Accounting Careers Subcommittee] was my mentor at the cable company. My mentor at H.J. Russell recommended me for the Olympics position.

**DAIDONE:** *Tell me about your educational background. Were you always interested in accounting?*

**JACKSON:** Actually, my interest in accounting came by chance. As a child, I was always interested in business. I would watch the TV news and hear terms such as the "stock market" and "Dow Jones Industrial Average" and wonder what these terms meant. I also had a natural inclination for math. When I went to Howard, I took accounting my freshman year and liked it. I knew then that I wanted to pursue a career in accounting.

**DAIDONE:** *What courses did you take in college?*

**JACKSON:** I took the basic business core courses to satisfy my accounting requirement. I also took electives in literature and English, which, I must stress, are very important. You can be a math whiz, but if you can't communicate in a written or oral form you will have a problem.

**DAIDONE:** *Tell me about your experience with the CPA exam. Is it as difficult to pass as the "experts" say?*

**JACKSON:** The CPA exam was the hardest exam I've ever taken. I first took it in 1979 when I was working for Arthur Andersen. At the time, I didn't like Big 8 accounting and I was starting to feel that a career as a CPA wasn't for me. I took the exam three times, however, and passed the last two parts my third time in 1980.

**DAIDONE:** *Do you have any suggestions for candidates planning to take the exam in May?*

**JACKSON:** It's best to take the exam as soon as you get out of school because you have all that knowledge fresh in your mind. Job experience can help, but you need to study very hard.

**DAIDONE:** *What is your ultimate goal?*

**JACKSON:** I would like to become a consultant for start-up companies once my position with the Olympics is phased out. I'd like to help companies with their financial operations, as well as assist them in establishing computerized accounting systems. I believe the experience I have in this area will prepare me well in pursuing consulting work.

## ***QCA program heightens student awareness of career opportunities with small firms***

A number of local and regional accounting firms in the Phoenix area have banded together to provide accounting students at Arizona State University with career options beyond the traditional Big 6 opportunities.

Quality Career Alternatives (QCA) was implemented during the 1990-91 academic year in an effort to inform students about the benefits of working at a smaller firm. Often, students look at local or regional firms only after they have been rejected by the Big 6 firms. The QCA program, however, puts local and regional firm representatives on equal footing with their Big 6 counterparts when it comes to recruiting students.

The program is the brainchild of Kumen Jones, faculty advisor to the Beta Tau chapter of Beta Alpha Psi at ASU. At a university recruiting function in February 1990, Jones noticed that the local and regional firm representatives were basically being neglected by the students and ended up talking amongst themselves.

As a result, Jones approached Carlos Wagner, a partner in the Phoenix-based firm Miller Wagner & Company Ltd., with the idea of forming a coalition of small firm representatives. A coalition of about 10 firms formed, and Wagner expects that number to grow by three or four as the 1991-92 academic year progresses.

The first year of the program, the 1990-91 academic year, revolved primarily around the Beta Alpha Psi students on campus. Wagner notes that QCA was successful in making many of these students aware of the benefits of working for a smaller firm. "A smaller environment offers more direct contact with clients and a greater sense of one-on-one training and mentoring," he explains.

In addition, because of changing demographics and the economic climate, QCA has helped the smaller firms attract better-quality recruits. According to an essay written by ASU student Kirk Kobert, Big 6 firms now hire only about one-third of accounting graduates at ASU — leaving many students looking at other options.

Despite the presence of QCA, Wagner says the Big 6 firms have been very supportive of what the coalition is doing. "It's not an 'us versus them' competition," he explains. "The common goal of *all* firms is to place students in the right environment for them."

During the 1990-91 academic year, the QCA coalition sponsored a reception following the Beta Alpha Psi pledge orientation meeting, hosted a multi-office tour, and helped double the number of local and regional firm representatives attending two "Meet the Firms" nights. In the past, this event has been dominated by the Big 6. To kick off the 1991-92 academic year, an accounting faculty reception was held in the fall and was very well received.

While Beta Alpha Psi will continue to have a strong presence in the program, Wagner notes that the coalition is also targeting an on-campus chapter of students affiliated with the Institute of Management Accountants.

Jones notes that the concept of the QCA program has been tried in other areas of the country, although he isn't aware if it is operating anywhere else at present. Jones adds that firms need to have a good working relationship with faculty in order for the QCA to be successful.

Educators and/or students interested in launching a QCA program in their area should contact either Kumen Jones at (602) 965-7219 or Carlos Wagner at (602) 264-6835 for further information.

## ***QCA — a recent grad's viewpoint***

*Pam Roads, a recent hire of Miller Wagner & Company Ltd., recently spoke to Accounting Careers about how the Quality Career Alternatives (QCA) program affected her while at Arizona State University.*

I joined Beta Alpha Psi in the fall of 1989, the beginning of my junior year. I immediately noticed that the other students were talking *only* about Big 6 opportunities. It was to the point where I felt I needed to learn more about additional career alternatives.

At a "Meet the Firms" night in September 1989, I met Carlos Wagner and Rob Leslie (both with Miller Wagner & Company) and was very impressed with what a local firm had to offer a student such as myself. As a result of this meeting, Carlos, Kumen Jones, and myself began the QCA in June 1990 as a means to inform students about the opportunities available at local and regional firms.

Because I didn't see myself working in a large firm environment, I felt that a local firm could provide me with greater exposure to various engagements. I also felt I would be more challenged.

I started with Miller Wagner in June 1991, and so far it has been a very good experience. I have been out on a special project since I started, so I have spent limited time in the office. Even so, the firm has made me feel welcome and has been very supportive, evidenced by the open-door policy of management.

I plan to continue my involvement with the QCA program as a firm member. My hope is that other students can find their "best fit" by looking at *all* their career options and not just the traditional opportunities.