



MARYLAND'S BUSINESS &amp; LEGAL NEWS SINCE 1888

# Cool People Apply

By **ANDY ROSEN**

*andy.rosen@mddailyrecord.com*

Public accounting is not the staid, buttoned-down profession some might think it is.

At least that's the impression that comes from a video about the state's CPAs soon to be posted on YouTube by the **Maryland Association of Certified Public Accountants**. The video, hosted by association President and CEO Tom Hood, makes use of quick cuts and tight shots, backed by a driving, electronic beat, in a frenetic, seven-minute encounter with CPAs working for some of the state's more appealing employers, like the **Baltimore Orioles** and the trendy clothier **South Moon Under**.

The video, said Hood, is part of an effort to create youthful interest in public accounting. The demand for CPAs has skyrocketed in recent years, and the industry — still lagging from a severe drop in college majors during the 1990s — is struggling to keep pace.

The association has started a virtual chapter in the online world called Second Life, and members also post regular blog entries on the association's Web site. Using new media to target young students is one method the industry is using to attract more talent.

"These are things that I think we have to do to reach this next generation," Hood said of the organization's recruiting efforts. Though more accountants are now graduating from the state's colleges and universities, there is still plenty of catching up to do. Hood estimates that the state's CPA industry is still understaffed by nearly a third.

Across the state and the country, the

number of accounting students declined by about 50 percent during the 1990s. Flat salary levels, expanded educational requirements and a generally poor image of the profession were among the reasons given for the drop.

The fallout from a series of financial scandals around 2001, which resulted in a tightening of accounting standards and an increased workload, only deepened the talent deficit, especially in Maryland.

Professional associations, educators and accounting firms have responded in a number of ways, raising salaries, marketing the profession, and striving to accommodate a new generation of workers. Still, for some aspiring accountants, opportunity and job security are selling points of their own.

Edoobar Osian, a senior accounting

major at the **University of Baltimore**, said he learned all he needed to know by surfing the Web for job openings.

After he graduated from **Towson University** with a business degree, Osian said he saw accounting professionals in high demand across the board, and soon entered the University of Baltimore. Still working on his certification, he's already working professionally as a paid intern.

"Overall, anywhere you look, there's basically [accounting] jobs," he said. "Being able to know that in 10 to 12 years, I could open my own firm, I was confident enough for me to go into it."

For graduating accounting students, life is good and their services are in high demand. Often times, seniors have stable, well-compensated jobs even before they graduate. There is also a wide range of



The modern looking conference room in the Reznick Group's Inner Harbor offices.

opportunities for today's accountant, both in the private and public sectors.

But on the other side of the coin, many area firms are struggling to fill accounting positions, especially in the entry and mid-level categories. More accountants are graduating from Maryland's colleges, but many say the talent pool needs to grow faster.

Between 2002 and 2005, the number of accounting majors increased by about 20 percent, according to the Maryland Association of CPAs. Still, that influx has not been enough to meet a growing demand for talent.

Though the press was not all good, developments like the collapse of **Enron Corp.** drew attention to the accounting trade and created more business. The ensuing passage of the Sarbanes-Oxley Act in 2002 tightened corporate financial reporting and disclosure guidelines, and increased the need for accounting professionals who were already in short supply.

The market was particularly challenging in Maryland, Hood said. Federal agencies around Washington — including the **Securities and Exchange Commission** and the newly-created **Public Company Accounting Oversight Board** — beefed up their staffs with accounting professionals as well to conduct greater oversight after the financial scandals.

"Those two hired somewhere between 500 and 700 CPAs," Hood said. "That really kind of made the Maryland marketplace probably the tightest in the nation."

The industry is still catching up, said Risa Guber, principal in charge of human resources for the Bethesda-based **Reznick Group**, one of the largest CPA firms in Maryland.

"We continue to have a demand that outstrips the supply of accountants in the work force," she said. Though there are more accountants graduating from colleges in the area, said Guber, there are plenty of jobs available as well.

"It's not easier because the competition is very stiff for these students," she said, and added that the market is also tight for CPAs with between three and six years of experience.

Since the supply of talent is low and the demand high, accountants' salaries have been rising steadily in recent years. According to **Robert Half International Inc.**, a staffing firm that counts accounting as one of its specialties and conducts market research on the field, salaries grew by 5.1 percent last year for public accountants at medium-sized firms.

In 2006, accountants with up to a year of experience in audit, tax and management services likely made between \$36,750 and \$46,000, according to Robert Half's literature. In 2007, the company is projecting that the same professional will make between \$39,000 and \$48,000.

Renee Whalen, senior regional vice president at RHI's Baltimore office, said business has been good for the staffing agency. She pointed out that the need for accountants often grows with the economy; when business is good, companies need to do more to keep track of their finances.

"It's still very difficult to find top quality talent," she said. "That's why I think there's such a need for our business. We've been very busy and I foresee us being very busy for a long time."

Guber, of the Reznick Group, said new accountants at her firm make anywhere between \$52,000 and \$58,000 per year. In addition, Reznick is working to adapt the workplace culture to best fit young professionals, she said.

The company is looking to make young workers feel engaged in the operations of the Reznick Group, Guber said, and is committed to showing them that the company recognizes the need for personal time. The hope, she said, is that a positive work envi-



MAXIMILIAN FRANZ

Young employees of the Reznick Group gather around a cubicle in their Inner Harbor offices.

ronment will prove to be an effective recruiting tool on its own.

"I think that for anybody in the work force, one of the common denominators is the desire to be engaged," she said. "I'd much rather read our people and understand what our work force is about than read a book."

*Reprinted with permission of  
The Daily Record Co. ©2007*

