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Practical Accountant[®]

PROVIDING THE COMPETITIVE EDGE™

A man in a light blue dress shirt and patterned tie is smiling and holding a red Specialized Allez road bicycle. The bicycle is the central focus, with the man's hands on the handlebars. The background is a plain, light-colored wall.

The 2007 INNOVATION Awards

Mark Robinson
Kirkland Albrecht & Fredrickson

Photo: Richard Wood

The 2007 Practice Innovation Award Winners

by Jeff Stimpson



Image: Photodisc

Practical Accountant's Practice Innovation Awards annually recognize accounting firms that take the lead in developing new or improved services and in promoting efficiency in the practice of public accounting. We do so in order for CPA firms to compare and contrast what they're doing with what other firms are doing, as well as encourage them to think about innovations they can implement.

This year, we're proud to recognize the highest number of winners in the eight years of the award. Firms of many sizes, from a few staffers to thousands, created niches in hot new areas, employed cutting-edge technology to best advantage, and thought well outside the box about staff recruiting and retention. This year's 34 winners are a creative crop of firms, many of them previous winners as well.

Please note that for uniformity, "partners" is used throughout to designate partners, officers, directors, members, principals, and other personnel terms particular to the ownership of firms.

KIRKLAND ALBRECHT & FREDRICKSON

Partners/Staff: 6/55
kafgroup.com

KAF has created a program that makes the "tax crunch" season run more smoothly for everyone with Project: Balance. The partner group decided early last fall to re-engineer tax season, beginning with the mandatory early closings of the office at 5:30 p.m. every Wednesday and Friday. The firm also brought in theme dinners the other three weeknights; limited Saturday work, in-season, to four Saturdays, two before March 15 and two before April 15; speeded up and evened out the tax workload by working closely with clients; determined early "extension" clients who are taken out of the season; established a team approach that shares responsibilities and workload; and used technology so work can be done anywhere, anytime.

A staff survey of Project: Balance revealed that 87 percent of KAF's staff said that their work/life balance improved over the prior tax seasons, 70 percent felt that they controlled when and where they worked; and 69 percent increased productivity. Further, 82 percent said working as a team to complete their assigned projects improved productivity, and 74 percent said communication in the firm and within teams improved. More than 65 percent of staff worked less than five Saturdays, compared with 90 percent working 12 or more Saturdays in prior years. Two-thirds of KAF's staff also took advantage of working from home on those Saturdays they did work. Most tellingly, perhaps, as of June 15 KAF had retained 100 percent of its staff, compared with 18 percent-plus turnover last year.



Front row, l to r: Lori Carr, audit team-associate I; and Mark Robinson, partner Back row, l to r: Jim Shepard, audit team-associate I; and Patricia Grenier, audit team-associate II

Photo: Richard Wood

KAF KIRKLAND ALBRECHT
& FREDRICKSON P.C.
CERTIFIED PUBLIC ACCOUNTANTS

10 Forbes Road West
Braintree, MA 02184
781-356-2000
www.kafgroup.com