

CGFM Celebrates 20 Years!

By: Jeffrey C. Steinhoff, CGFM, CPA, CFE, CGMA

As the Certified Government Financial Manager (CGFM) program celebrates its 20th anniversary, everyone in AGA should be proud of the profound impact we have had in raising the bar and recognizing the special knowledge, skills and abilities of government financial managers at all levels of government, academia and the private sector. We advance government accountability in some of the world's largest, most complex organizations. Nothing compares to what our members tackle day-in and day-out in service to our great Nation.

The CGFM certification specifically addresses this important role of serving the public, recognizing the unique aspects of and reflecting the diversity of government financial management at all levels of government. The designation offers benefits to the CGFMs, their employers and the public, recognizing professionals with an in-depth knowledge and understanding of government financial management. CGFM has become an important part of AGA's mission and, as we see the number of CGFMs grow and celebrate March as CGFM month, it is hard to imagine this program is now 20-years old.

It seems like just yesterday, when I was excitedly readying to assume the mantle as AGA's National President. I planned, and then planned some more, formulating an agenda for what would be a year that passed in a blur. CGFM was absolutely not on my radar screen nor was it part of my original vision for my presidency presented to the National Executive Committee (NEC) and the National Board of Directors (NBD) at PDC 1993 in Orlando. But, then, two things happened that changed my plans and put CGFM center stage.

First, while testifying before a Senate Committee in 1993, the Chairmen and committee members emphasized I was a CPA in setting the stage on why my testimony was important and should be taken seriously. Certainly I am proud to be a CPA; but it struck me that being a CPA was not nearly as relevant to the issues being discussed at the hearing as were the knowledge, skills and abilities gained as a member of the government financial management community and AGA. That started the thought process for me about how to recognize government financial managers and what we do in the public sector that sets us apart from the private sector. The second thing was then National Treasurer Tom Sadowski's long-range fiscal projection. Tom concluded AGA would be financially successful during my presidency and the following year, but would begin experiencing problems with declining membership and limited revenue sources.

These two elements came together – recognition of the special knowledge, skills and abilities of government financial managers through a certification program could also be a springboard for expanding AGA's reach and solidifying our purpose and membership base. So, the wheels went in motion on what was launched in 1994 as my term as National President was ending. It took a lot of hard work, and support from many people willing to take a chance and move forward into a new world. The stars aligned, and through the knowledge, skills and abilities the CGFM program symbolizes, the AGA team was able to take it from a concept to a highly successful reality.

Two decades later, we are proud to have 9,600 CGFMs in our ranks. Our examinations are rigorous, and our processes for maintaining examinations and program integrity are leading-edge. The CGFM Board, chaired by Gerry Boaz, continues its outstanding work. We are ably supported by a superlative staff led by Katya Silver, Director of Professional Certification, who continues to be the driving force in moving us to greater heights. The CGFM program attracted – and continues to attract – many new members to AGA, under the exceptional leadership of our Executive Directors, Charlie Culkin and Relmond Van Daniker, and our National Presidents.

Special thanks go to the first CGFM Board, which it was my privilege to chair for the first four years – Charles Harrison, Virginia Robinson, Bill Broadus, Sam McCall, Marty Ives and Pete Rose – and Hal Steinberg, for providing his technical expertise at every step. They made everything happen for this 'start-up' venture, dedicating countless volunteer hours to a labor of love. Thanks go to many volunteers behind the scenes, led by Bill Anderson, and Eva Williams, who flawlessly processed thousands of applications, and to our chapter CGFM coordinators. Thanks also go to the NEC and the NBD for having the courage to take a chance and move forward with a new concept.

Now, what is the challenge to each of you today as the CGFM program embarks on its next 20 years? First, if you are not already a CGFM, join the proud ranks through our examination process. You will learn a lot as you study for the three examinations. AGA offers excellent study guides and training. If you are already among those

honored to be a CGFM, be an ambassador for the program. Encourage others, both in your chapters and at work, to expand their horizon and become a CGFM. There is strength in numbers, and the value of being a CGFM will only grow as the number of CGFMs grows. We have a lot to be proud of from the past two decades, but the best years are ahead as the CGFM program continues its impressive journey. 🏆



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comptroller general of the United States for Accounting and Information Management and GAO's managing director for Financial Management and Assurance, he served on the staff of the Senate Government Affairs Committee and was a principal architect of the CFO Act and the range of companion financial management reform legislation. He helped to found AGA's CGFM Program, and served as the first chair of the Professional Certification Board. In 2010, he was elected a fellow of the prestigious National Academy of Public Administration.

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