

# Fun with accountants?

**L**adies and gentlemen, Elvis has depreciated the building!" And with a hearty "Thank you ... thank you very much," he's ushered out the side exit and into a waiting limo, while dozens of weak-kneed corporate officers remain frenzied from having seen a live performance of the King with a calculator.

OK, so maybe audits don't work this way. And they never will. After all, accountants and auditors are all geeks who live and breathe numbers without even a pinch of chaos.

Or are they?

H. Terry Hancock, who runs Clifton Gunderson's mid-Atlantic operation from its office in Baltimore, says people might be surprised to learn that the partners and staff of CG's Maryland offices are real people — with lives, hobbies and enough personality for a Hollywood casting call.

"Someone once said that an accountant is an engineer with a personality," quipped Hancock, noting that among the Baltimore office's more colorful partners are several excellent golfers, an accomplished equestrian and an Elvis fanatic who took advantage of a partner meeting in Vegas to renew wedding vows — in the standard-issue white jumpsuit, with an Elvis preacher.

Hardly the soda-bottle glasses and can't-walk-and-chew-gum stuff of stereotypical accounting lore. And that's exactly one of the reasons A-List fans voted Clifton Gunderson among the top accounting firms they still trust.

Hancock believes this confidence in his firm stems from the fact that the highest-level partners — the ones who set the tone for the company — are down-to-earth people who understand the importance of enjoying what they do and establishing honest relationships.

Never has this philosophy been more important than now, in the wake of the Enron and WorldCom accounting blunders. It's a very serious time for the already-serious business of accounting. Whether CG is conducting a year-end tax review for one person or a massive audit, Hancock says his coworkers all understand the firm's integrity is on the line every time.

"We don't lose many clients; we develop a great loyalty because ... our philosophy is it's the relationship that makes it work," he said.

Clifton Gunderson was founded in 1960 and was primarily a Midwest accounting firm. When Hancock came on board in 1982, he opened the mid-Atlantic operation, with the 20-person staff focusing on work for Maryland's Medicaid program.

Since then, the Baltimore office has been augmented with an office in Calverton and a satellite office in Bel Air. The mid-Atlantic operation totals 270 employees and includes a Richmond, Va., office.

The firm is so well respected that it was chosen to audit the

General Accounting Office for the past five years. While such work is routinely rotated among accounting firms, "We were quite honored a firm our size was entrusted to do that. That's typically 'big four' territory," says Hancock.

Nationally, CG is considered the 12th-largest accounting firm, with 52 offices in 13 states and the District of Columbia. But Hancock says once you get past the big four, "the stats drop off pretty rapidly... they're in the billions, this year we'll probably do \$180 million firmwide."

And that's just fine with Hancock, who notes that CG's emphasis on relationships is woven into every one of its offices. "We function as one firm. We don't share profits in a single office, we share firmwide profits," says Hancock. "If a particular office has a bad year, they don't go down the tubes."

Taking care of each office as well as it takes care of business has done wonders for the firm. Hancock says CG puts forth "a very high quality-of-life philosophy." There's actually a dedicated "fun group" that plans activities for everyone in the mid-Atlantic operation. The annual crab feast draws 400-500 employees and family members. There are parking-lot cookouts in the summer, and there's the occasional round of office bingo.

"We work hard; we play hard," Hancock says, and "I love what I do." While the Arthur Anderson auditing scandal generally has given the industry a black eye, CG staff aren't about to let it get them down. "We can't let it change us. To be good at what we do, we have to like it, and we have to enjoy coming to work," he says.

BY  
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## Twice shy

### Accounting firm you still trust

For those of you who answered "none" to this survey question, TDR understands. Clearly most of us have had suspicion pummeled into us with each successive scandal, but there are those firms with clean records, business rectitude and stellar reputations. Here are the accounting firms you say you still trust:

Firm	Address	Phone number	Web site	Services
Rosen, Saperstein & Friedlander	300 Red Brook Blvd., Suite 200, Owings Mills, MD 21117	(410) 681-0800	www.rschart.com	Accounting and auditing, tax compliance, planning and consulting, management consulting, business valuations, litigation support, family and estate planning, strategic planning, business plans, mergers and acquisitions, information technology, succession