

beyond the Numbers



“This profession opens up
so many doors for women.”

Andrea Cope, CPA

What's Cooking?

Andrea Cope is known around these parts as CalCPA's centennial chair, but lesser-known facts about her include:

- She's been to culinary school.
- She once had to fire herself.
- She signed Don Henley's (of the Eagles) will.

Cope began her accounting career at Windes McLaughery in Long Beach after graduating with a bachelor's degree in accounting from CSU Sacramento in 1981. Over the course of the next dozen years, she worked for various firms, including controller for the Houston Symphony and at a business management firm for high net worth movie stars and executives.

That position lead to the aforementioned signing of Don Henley's will, which landed as a thank you to her on one of his albums and provided an opportunity to meet agent and movie producer Jay Kanter's wife, Judy, who was a bridesmaid for Grace Kelly.

Cope also spent nearly seven years at a firm with an emphasis on working with restaurants, which heightened her percolating culinary interests.

After that stretch of unique experiences, she chose a different path. “I just needed a change,” she says. “I had always wanted to learn to cook professionally and it just



Andrea Cope

Point of Pride:

60-inch-round, Gustav Stickley signed, oak table and chairs

Lifelong Dream:

Owning a ranch and raising goats

Advice:

“Don't always concentrate on the salary. The money part is just one aspect. If you're happy somewhere, you'll probably do better and have bonuses come your way. And learn how to give a good handshake.”



“... accounting is the foundation on which all other business disciplines stand.”

Cheryl Cruz, CPA

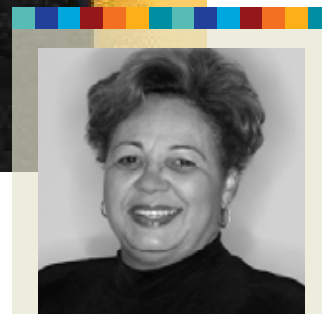
Accounting is the Foundation

The career of CPA Cheryl Cruz is nothing short of impressive: legislative aid to Massachusetts Rep. Royal Bolling Jr.; special assistant to New York Sen. H. Carl McCall; law clerk for the Attorney General of California, the California Court of Appeals and the SEC; real estate developer; tax supervisor for Coopers & Lybrand; and associate dean of Undergraduate Studies at Cal State LA—just to name a few.

But the apex of her career, she says, is being an accounting educator. “Whether it’s helping students with the subject matter, finding the career path that’s right for them or expanding their résumés to land that first job, I love being a mentor,” says Cruz.

As a tax and accounting professor at Cal State LA, Cruz, among other duties, teaches individual and corporate tax, and financial accounting. She is also the undergraduate adviser for the College of Business and Economics. Cruz began at Cal State LA in 1990 as a lecturer, quickly rising to professor and, later, chair of the accounting department.

To what does she owe her success? “My father always told me, without a good foundation, the building crumbles. And accounting is the foundation upon which all other business disciplines stand,” Cruz says. “Any part of a



Cheryl Cruz

First Professional Job:
Assistant buyer, Filene’s
Department Stores

First Concert:
Earth, Wind and Fire

Key Charities:
College Bound, Jack and Jill,
NAACP

seemed to be the perfect time to take a sabbatical and develop the more creative side of my brain and learn how to create great food!”

So she attended an 18-month program at the California Culinary Academy in San Francisco, where she “had the time of my life,” she says. “A lot of light bulbs went on learning how to do techniques on how to cook properly.”

Eventually Cope moved back to accounting and began working at Burr Pilger Mayer, although she was still keeping her catering business, Two Chefs Catering, on a simmer.

“We would shop on Wednesdays and Thursdays, start prep on Thursdays, I would come home on Friday and we’d cook until midnight and cater our events at the weekend,” she says. “But after about two years of that I fired myself. It was too much effort. I cook for family and friends now and people are more than happy to come over for dinner.”

Since returning to accounting, Cope, now a partner at BPM, has an unrivaled passion and respect for the profession.

“This profession opens up so many doors for women,” she says. “You can go into tax, finance, economics, industry, your time can be flexible—but you’ll always have a job. The CPA license gives you that added credibility you need to show the world that your qualifications are unparalleled.”

business—whether it’s finance, management or marketing—can’t do anything until accountants provide the numbers.”

Cruz holds a bachelor’s degree in retail marketing from the University of Massachusetts at Amherst; an MBA in finance from

Northeastern University in Boston; a juris doctor from UCLA law school; and a master's in business taxation from USC.

But after all those degrees and job titles, her career has come full circle, back to the halls of a school building. And she couldn't be happier. "It's a very rewarding career," she says.



Chris Davis

College:
Golden Gate University,
San Francisco
First Concert:
David Bowie
First Career Ambition:
Teacher
What Inspires Her:
Having faith

Chris Davis, CPA

Super Sleuth

CPA and forensic accountant Chris Davis doesn't leap over buildings in a single bound, but she is a modern-day corporate crime fighter. She gathers and explains evidence that demonstrates why audits failed and how corporations broke the accounting rules—conditions that have resulted in massive investor losses.

During her early years as a forensic accountant, she took on more than two years of forensic investigation that helped settle a widely publicized case involving Sunbeam Corp., in which the allegations included GAAP and federal

your life matters

Quality of life counts. CPA careers are among the more flexible and promote a work-life balance. Flex-time and telecommuting are standard for most businesses. Combined with bonuses, incentives—one firm actually helps employees with their down payment for a home—educational and advancement opportunities, many CPAs will argue that their career “perks” rival those of any other profession.

While no one can guarantee a career uninterrupted by layoffs or economic slumps, CPAs are more resilient than most during a recession. Their basic skills are vital to every business, so when one industry is downsizing, CPAs likely will find opportunities in others that are hot or developing new technologies or services.

“It’s investigative work,
retracing what happened and what
went wrong.”

securities laws violations against the company’s senior management, and professional malpractice against Sunbeam’s outside auditors.

Davis, who has been involved in some of the highest-profile cases involving GAAP and GAAS violations, is a director in the litigation consulting and forensic accounting group of Hemming Morse, a San Francisco-based CPA firm with several offices in California.

“It’s investigative work, retracing what happened and what went wrong, and communicating our findings to the trier of fact,” she says. “I like it because we constantly refer to the standards of the accounting profession. I’m able to stay on top of what I should know.”

It’s only fitting that one of Davis’ heroes is Sherron Watkins, the Enron executive and former outside auditor who blew the whistle on the energy trading company after she discovered financial irregularities.

“She was very brave and stood up for what she believed and what she thought was right against very powerful individuals,” Davis says.

Davis is the mother of two daughters in college, the older attending Columbia University and the younger attending the Rhode Island School of Design. She credits her company’s supportive work environment for achieving a work-life balance that allows her to be involved in her daughters’ endeavors without sacrificing professional success.

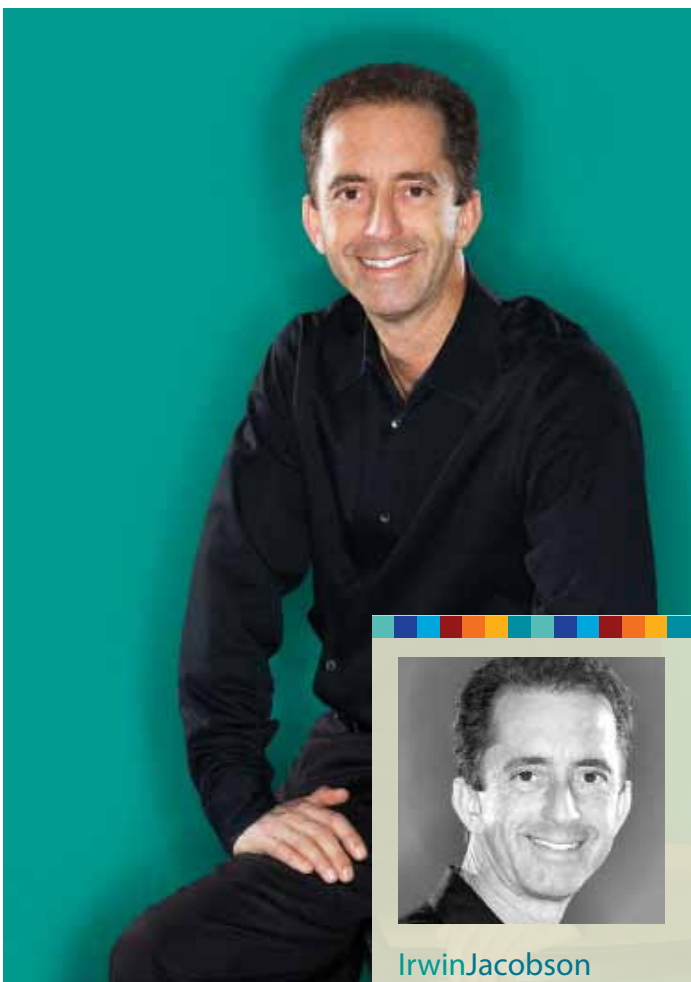
If Davis were a superhero, she says she would be Buffy the Vampire Slayer. “She appears small and apparently harmless, but turns out

to have very strong convictions and amazing strength—always saves the day.”

Takes one to know one.

Irwin Jacobson, CPA

Listen to Your Grandmother



After more than 25 years as a CPA at Sony Pictures and in the entertainment industry, Irwin Jacobson still wakes up every morning anxious about what his professional career might bring that day. “I love the industry,” he says. “The numbers part of it makes it intellectually stimulating, and the entertainment environment surrounding it keeps it engaging.”

Irwin Jacobson

College:

University of Washington

What Inspires You:

Seeing a soundstage converted into a world that didn't exist before.

Advice:

“Anyone can get a job; the trick is building a career.”

do you have the skills?

What does it take to enter the dynamic field that is today's CPA profession? Adding and subtracting are still key, but CPAs who do taxes or oversee an organization's books find their jobs less tedious because computer software has relieved many of the number-crunching chores. Just remember, though, that CPAs still need to know if the right numbers are entered into computers and if the results are valid.

It's no wonder teachers have inundated you with estimation skills for years. Believe it or not, estimating candy corn in a jar is actually a first step toward an exciting career. But many CPAs spend relatively little time crunching numbers. Today, firms and businesses who hire CPAs are looking for individuals who:

Think Critically: From Sun Microsystems to a Krispy Kreme doughnut franchise, California's businesses need CPAs to review their business practices and recommend improvements. CPAs who offer financial planning services must be savvy about stocks and investments, as well as appreciate group dynamics. CPAs must know how to evaluate the importance of all factors influencing a business, translate these factors into an operable plan and provide valid reasoning for their proposals.

Communicate Effectively: CPAs do not spend their days holed up in dark cubicles clutching a calculator. They constantly talk with people. Firms and businesses value CPAs who can communicate in person and in writing. Communication skills help CPAs expand client relationships and build new ones, as well as establish them as experts in their areas of interest.

Cooperate: Whether they work in companies, nonprofits or government agencies, CPAs must be able to cooperate with the various personalities and interests that make up an organization. Even CPAs who work for themselves need people skills that will allow them to develop strong client relationships and work effectively with their staff.

Satiate Their Curiosity: CPAs often investigate an organization's financial, technological and environmental practices, among others. They need to know what questions to ask beyond the obvious. Sometimes they must develop expertise in areas outside of their educational background. CPAs must be active learners throughout their career.

Adapt: The world is constantly changing, so a successful CPA needs to be adaptable and always looking for new business opportunities and new relationships.

Maintain High Ethical Standards: CPAs are known for their trustworthiness and are highly respected because of their adherence to a professional code of conduct. That code is stressed in their college studies and is an integral part of the licensing process. Unethical actions can result in the loss of a CPA license and a corresponding drop in earnings potential.

“Having a CPA license pays off 10 times more than the effort it takes to obtain it.” —Irwin Jacobson

In his freshman year in college, Jacobson thought he would go into marketing and advertising—until he mentioned the idea to his grandmother. Her response? “Are you kidding? You need to do something practical. You need to be an accountant. Your name is Irwin, after all.”

Taking grandma’s advice, he did some research and found that accounting fit him quite nicely. But, to avoid the nerdy stereotypes of accounting and find the sexy side of the profession, Jacobson honed his accounting training to cater to the entertainment world.

“Debits are debits and credits are credits—that never changes,” he says. “But what you’re dealing with behind those numbers is the exciting part and, for me, that’s entertainment.”

And there has been no shortage of exciting moments for Jacobson.

Under the guise of having to do a physical inventory on the set, he climbed up the mast of Captain Hook’s ship when Steven Spielberg was producing “Hook” at Sony Pictures Studios. “I got to watch Spielberg direct,” he says. “That was like magic for me.”

He’s also met dozens of celebrities on the studio lot with the likes of Geena Davis, Robert Duvall, Michael Keaton, Pamela Anderson and Jason Priestley. “You never knew who you’re going to bump into walking back from the parking structure to the office,” he says.

Off the studio lot, Jacobson also had the chance to affect change with government agencies as a spokesperson for Sony.

“I went to Sacramento to argue about the way property taxes are assessed on studios,” he says. “I also spoke in front of the California Board of Equalization, and attended a fund-raising art show for Rick Auerbach when he was running for county assessor. We wanted to make sure our position was well understood. These are not things you would think are normal course of business activities for an accountant, and it provided added value for me.”

Jacobson’s 20-year career at Sony Pictures recently culminated, and he served the past several years as vice president of finance and controller for the studios. Today he’s on the hunt for the next adventure in entertainment, and is trying to branch out into other entertainment opportunities and broaden his résumé even further. And he knows his CPA license will get him safely to his next destination.

“Having a CPA license pays off 10 times more than the effort it takes to obtain it,” he says. “There’s a big difference between saying you’re an accountant versus a certified public accountant. As a CPA, you’ve earned a higher level of professional respect.”

Kathy Johnson, CPA

Nose for News (and Numbers)



Kathy Johnson

Colleges:

University of Texas at Austin,
University of Texas at Arlington

Spends Her Free Time:

Watching sports or westerns

Who Would Play Her in a Movie:

Angela Bassett—“I like her
tenacity.”

Most Exciting Time in the Newsroom:

President Barack Obama’s
election

Kathy Johnson knew accounting was going to be for her since her first exposure to it in high school. What she didn’t expect was a career that would consist of working at a number of different publications around the nation, from *Dallas Homes* magazine to *USA Today*.

Her first job in newspapers was as a staff accountant at the *Dallas Times Herald*. “It wasn’t something I expected to happen, but I always loved reading newspapers and thought, ‘Why not apply for the position and get into newspapers on the ground level.’”

From there Johnson moved to the *Houston Post* and eventually to *USA Today*, working as the controller in the circulation office, which took her to Los Angeles and then to Atlanta.

“Working at *USA Today* was really awesome,” she says. “The atmosphere and camaraderie was really exciting. You got a lot of training.”

Does the profession pay well?

In California, general trends show starting salaries begin in the \$45,000 to \$60,000 range for graduates with accounting degrees. Once you get your CPA license, you can expect to receive a salary of \$75,000 or more. These numbers will be higher if overtime and/or bonus is built in. When you hit partner level in an accounting firm or a top-level management or executive position in a business, you can anticipate earning approximately \$200,000 or more in the first few years. Of course, your salary may vary based on the business type, size of the firm or location. Salaries in Willits will be less than those in San Francisco, but the cost of living will be less too. The bottom line is that, as a CPA, your salary takes care of you.



“Going through what I did to become a CPA really helped me to be proficient in what I do.”

But Johnson wanted to get back to California, and eventually took a job at the *San Jose Business Journal* during the dot-com era. “That was also exciting,” she says. “But I really missed working for a big newspaper, and the dot-com era was slowing down, so I took a position for the *Arizona Republic*.”

Johnson stayed there for a while, but California beckoned, so she moved to Los Angeles to work for the Los Angeles Newspaper Group, which owns nine newspapers. She is vice president of finance for the group’s Inland Newspaper Division, which operates six of the nine daily papers.

Johnson’s job includes copious amounts of forecasting, which has submersed her in the print versus internet discussion all newspapers are facing. “One of my jobs over the next month is to figure out which subscribers are more profitable,” she says. “Part of the problem is we’re

dealing with three generations of consumers, who all want their news in different forms: web, newspaper, cell phone, etc.”

Johnson says her CPA license and training have served her well. “Going through what I did to become a CPA really helped me to be proficient in what I do,” she says.

Not knowing what to expect each day she goes into the office keeps her interested in her job. This variety is something Johnson believes many people overlook about being a CPA.

“There are many different types of positions within accounting,” she says. “Many people avoid it because they say they don’t want to do taxes. I don’t do taxes—besides my own. You also don’t have to do auditing, but it will give you an inside look at how a company operates in that two-year period. If you think you can help people manage their money, or invest, you can also go that route.”

Joseph Montes, CPA

More Than Just a License

Joseph Montes was always good at math, so he decided to research a career that would cater to his strong suit and found accounting.



“I learned that you could get your CPA license and pursue a career in public accounting and maybe work your way up to the partner level,” he recalls. “Or you could take your license and go into industry and try and work your way up the corporate ranks, maybe even into a CFO position.”

If you’re going to study accounting, Montes says, getting your CPA license is a must because “based on what I’ve seen, a CPA license opens up many more doors and will increase your earnings power, especially if you are a strong performer and have experience.”

Montes opted for the public accounting route, starting at the staff level and working his way up the ranks to senior manager in the audit department for Armanino McKenna, LLP. Besides preparing his staff for advancement within the firm, Montes has several audit engagements and client visits on any given day, and is exposed to the inner workings of a variety of businesses, from tech to nonprofit, and from health to retail.

“Our audit practice is diverse and our firm services clients operating in many different industries,” he says. “Part of our responsibility is to really understand the client’s business. To really get behind the numbers.”

While clients and industries may change, Montes says one thing has remained the same in his 11-year career: “You learn something new

Joseph Montes

College:

Santa Clara University

First Career Ambition:

Doctor

Spends Leisure Time:

Playing with his kids in the park, softball

Worst Job:

High school janitor

A large, full-body portrait of Joseph Montes, a man with short hair, smiling. He is wearing a dark, long-sleeved shirt and has his arms crossed. The background is a solid, dark red color.

“Based on what I’ve seen, a CPA license opens up many more doors and increases your earning power.”

every day. It's an intellectually challenging environment that I really enjoy."

An additional benefit of a CPA career Montes has discovered is job security, especially in today's rough economy. "I don't want to call it recession-proof, but, while friends and colleagues of mine in different fields have been laid off, I have not had to deal with all that," he says. "The opportunities with a CPA license are endless. There's so much you can do with your career."

Okorie Ramsey, CPA

The Places You'll Go and People You'll Meet

For Okorie Ramsey, being a CPA has exceeded his expectations of simply dealing with numbers. "I'm constantly dealing with people and talking through ideas and strategies," he says. "It's very different than just sitting behind a desk and dealing with numbers."

Ramsey started his career with Coopers and Lybrand, first in San Francisco and then in Chicago, where he moved up to senior staff. He then spent another nine years in public accounting between Arthur Andersen and Ernst & Young, where he served as a Risk Advisory Senior Manager before joining Kaiser Permanente.

Ramsey decided to return to industry and joined Kaiser Foundation Health Plan, Inc. and Hospitals as the Director of Sarbanes/Oxley & Financial Governance for the Northern California Region.


In short, Ramsey has no shortage of experience.

"I started out as your traditional, Big Four accounting guy and now I lead the SOX function for the Northern California Region of Kaiser Foundation Health Plan, Inc. and Hospitals" says Ramsey. "I'm completely out of accounting now,

but my foundation in accounting has been invaluable throughout my career."

Ramsey is responsible for SOX and financial governance in one of Kaiser's largest regions, overseeing a team that facilitates the testing and remediation of control deficiencies for SOX and audit management issues. "It's kind of a compliance and operational management function," he says.

The main thing he loves about his job is working with and helping people to develop and achieve their full potential.

"I can't say enough about the importance and benefits of having mentors," he says. "I'm a mentor to many people that I have encountered in my career and it's important for me to give back and help others. People are our most important and valuable asset." 



Okorie Ramsey

College:

San Francisco State University

Charities: Accounting Career Awareness Program, National Association of Black Accountants

First Concert:

Janet Jackson

Advice:

"Join a professional organization to learn public speaking skills, leadership and gain access into the profession."



"I'm constantly dealing with people and talking through ideas and strategies."