



MSCPA FORMS DIVERSITY, EQUITY AND INCLUSION TASK FORCE

MSCPA 2020-2021 Chairman Annette Pridgen will chair the new MSCPA Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) Task Force. DEI Task Force members include Amanda Angle of Watkins Uiberall, PLLC in Tupelo, Phillip Chu of Office of the State Auditor in Jackson, Lydia Didia of Jackson State University in Jackson, Sim Mosby of Silas Simmons, LLP in Natchez, Brooks Poole of Mississippi College in Clinton, and Pam Steverson of Kemp Williams Steverson & Bernard, PA in Meridian.

The DEI Task Force held their first meeting July 29 to discuss the purpose of the task force and to draft a diversity statement. The statement was approved by the MSCPA Board of Governors at their August 12th meeting.

MSCPA Diversity Statement: The Mississippi Society of Certified Public Accountants is committed to serving as a premier state professional organization. To achieve this status, it must lead in encouraging, valuing, and fostering diversity in its membership and in the workforce. The MSCPA affirms the importance of diversifying the accounting profession and promoting workforce diversity by making these objectives among the MSCPA's highest priorities. Therefore, in principle and in practice, the MSCPA will identify, recognize, and support strategies and efforts within the organization and profession that are dedicated to achieving the MSCPA's diversity objectives. The MSCPA will continue to actively recruit and maintain diverse membership and leadership.

Deloitte's Making Accounting Diverse and Equitable (MADE) gave the MSCPA a one-time contribution of \$5,000 earmarked for DEI. The MSCPA DEI Task Force will determine the best way to use the contribution for current or planned initiatives and efforts.

NOMINATE AN OUTSTANDING EDUCATOR

The MSCPA Awards, Education & Scholarships Committee is seeking nominations for the Outstanding Educator Award for 2021-2022.

Each year the committee requests nominations for selection of an educator who has made significant contributions as an accounting instructor. That individual is honored during the MSCPA Annual Business Meeting at Convention in June.

Nominations should be submitted in writing by **October 1** to be considered by the committee. Send your nominations to Outstanding Educator, c/o MSCPA, 306 Southampton Row, Ridgeland, MS 39157 to the attention of Shawn Mauldin, Committee Chairman.

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JERRY SPEED LEE, CPA
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Opinions expressed are not necessarily the official policy of the MSCPA. Advertising is accepted in good faith that the product/services are of value stated.

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MSCPA HOSTED MBS BLOOD DRIVE

MSCPA hosted a Blood Drive on the Mississippi Blood Services Donor Coach July 21 at the MSCPA Training Center in Ridgeland. Donors received a t-shirt and were registered for a chance to win Brandon Amphitheater concert tickets. MSCPA and MBS would like to thank the members and others who donated blood to give someone a second chance.



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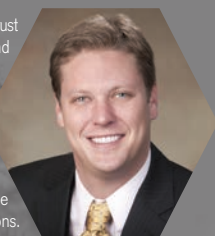
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ASSESSMENT IS KEY TO A SUCCESSFUL D&I EFFORT

To track your organization's diversity and inclusion progress, you first need to have a baseline.

By Anita Dennis

We're in the midst of a passionate national conversation around the importance of diversity and inclusion (D&I). Many CPA firms and other organizations are making the choice to enhance programs to foster greater diversity, equity, and inclusion in their workforce. However, for those efforts to be successful, employers need to know where to start.

Organizations often turn to Crystal Cooke, director—Diversity & Inclusion at the Association of International Certified Professional Accountants, with questions on topics such as training or the best places to recruit diverse professionals. These questions, she said, are sometimes premature.

"I tell [organizations] to take a step back before rolling out any new programs," she said. Instead, she recommends that organizations start their D&I journey by first looking at it strategically. They can do that by taking stock of where they are right now. "You can't improve or advance without assessing where you're starting from," she observed.

D&I efforts require strategy, and part of that strategy should include assessment, advised Kristin Seeger, CPA, director of talent acquisition at 200-employee firm Kreischer Miller. Before her firm had a formal strategy, "we were aware that we needed to increase our efforts to affect our team

member diversity and we made some adjustments, but now we have explicit goals," she said.

To help stimulate change, leaders at Kreischer Miller completed the AICPA Accounting Inclusion Maturity Model (AIMM) assessment ("Using the Accounting Inclusion Maturity Model"), a questionnaire that helps organizations evaluate their progress on D&I. The AIMM allowed Kreischer Miller to identify necessary focus areas and set priorities, as well as create a baseline for future assessments. "We are now better set up to track our performance and analyze results going forward," Seeger said.

The assessment helped the firm to measure the progress it had made. After conducting the firm's analysis and making policy changes, the percentage of female directors increased from 14% in 2017 to 26% today, Seeger said. With regard to ethnic diversity, the firm's percentage of ethnically diverse team members rose from 3% to 9% in the same period.

How to assess your D&I efforts

If you're ready to assess your organization's D&I efforts, following are some steps to take. Note that this process can take time when it's done thoughtfully, Cooke said. It could take a couple of months, given the time necessary to gain leadership buy-in on the importance and

incorporation of D&I in your organization, perform the assessment, understand the results, get staff input and insight on areas to address, and develop a strategic plan. "Don't feel you have to have all the answers today," she said. "The journey will be more successful if firms get the foundational work right."

Define what diversity, equity, and inclusion mean for your organization

In the early stages, it's also important for employers to be clear about how they define diversity, equity, and inclusion. "Don't be an organization that just throws the terms around without really thinking about what they mean and gaining alignment on the definition, concepts, and values that you are trying to convey," Cooke said.

A strategy needs to encompass not just diversity but equity and inclusion as well. What this means in workplace terms, Cooke said, is whether you have the right complement of people who represent the community you serve, whether your approaches ensure that everyone has access to the same opportunities, and whether you provide a space of psychological safety where everyone is encouraged and expected to contribute and be valued for those contributions.

continued on page 9



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Determine what indicators of D&I you want to measure and gather data

Some key indicators of how well an organization is doing in terms of D&I include the hiring, promotion, retention, and turnover percentages of groups that are underrepresented among staff or at leadership levels.

For example, HORNE LLP tracks whether people are moving into positions of opportunity, from associate all the way to partner, since it believes that career progress is an important indicator of D&I progress. “Establishing a strong pipeline is the only way to have a sustainable, strong, and diverse team,” said Joey Havens, CPA, CGMA, executive partner of the more than 900-employee firm.

However, organizations should consider other metrics as well. They may also track how long it takes employees from different demographic groups to be promoted or reach certain leadership levels to see if it is more difficult for women, ethnic minorities, or other underrepresented groups to advance, and to spot where the roadblocks might lie. Organizations should consider breaking down their numbers by office or practice group level as well to pinpoint sectors that are doing particularly well or that are in need of improvement.

Data about why employees leave can also be valuable. HORNE uses exit interviews to better understand what makes people leave and tracks referrals to see if team members are recommending the firm to friends and colleagues, Havens said. Grant Thornton also surveys employees and gathers ongoing feedback from its business resource groups (BRGs) on inclusion and belonging, said Rashada Whitehead, Grant Thornton’s head of culture, diversity, equity, and

inclusion. BRGs are groups of employees who join together in their workplace based on shared characteristics or life experiences.

Develop goals

In developing goals, organizations should avoid creating inadvertent D&I ceilings, Whitehead advised. If an organization aims to increase women’s leadership to 40%, for example, that percentage should be viewed as “a goal, but not a limit,” she said.

There are clear benefits to spending time to assess your D&I efforts, Seeger said. “By seeing how we are doing, we can plan better and determine where we may need to course-correct,” she said. “By measuring our efforts, we hold ourselves accountable for the success we look to achieve.”

Using the Accounting Inclusion Maturity Model

Firms seeking a free, ready-made measurement tool can turn to the AICPA Accounting Inclusion Maturity Model (AIMM), which features a straightforward assessment that enables firms to judge where they stand in four key areas (workplace, workforce, marketplace, and supplier and community).

- The Workplace (or Culture) section measures the impact of your firm’s D&I commitment on the workplace in which your people create value, find acceptance, and advance their careers. It also considers how you bring diverse employees together and make their voices heard.
- The Workforce (or People) section measures the processes you have in place to ensure that your workforce is diverse and reflective of the

communities in which you operate. Also, it reviews how your organization ensures fair advancement, performance evaluations, and application of benefits.

- The Marketplace (or Clients) section measures how your firm influences diversity in the marketplace through such factors as the types of clients you choose, the communities in which you do business, and how you market the diversity of your organization.
- The Supplier and Community section measures how you incorporate and consider diversity in your selection of outside vendors, as well as how you engage in diversity-related interests or projects in your community.

Firm leaders can fill out a confidential online questionnaire and receive a report telling them how their firm is performing in each of these areas. The AIMM allows users to establish a benchmark and track their progress over time and to compare their results with other users’.

Your answers to the questionnaire will result in a percentage that will assess your organization as either aspiring, emerging, managing, or optimizing D&I. “An organization that is optimizing in the D&I space is what we are all striving for,” said Crystal Cooke, director—Diversity & Inclusion at the Association of International Certified Professional Accountants. However, she noted that a lower result is “not necessarily a sign of deficiency but an opportunity to explore different approaches to creating an inclusive environment and achieving better business results.” The assessment, she said, can point organizations to aspects of D&I they may have not yet considered and suggest best practices they may want to adopt.



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REMOTE WORK Creating More Hacker and Malware Opportunities

by Randy R. Werner, J.D., LL.M./Tax, CPA

As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, working remotely has opened new potential access points and vulnerabilities that hackers are exploiting. CPA firms are already prime targets for identity thieves, and these new vulnerabilities exacerbate the profession's cyber-related challenges. Now, more than ever, data security is an urgent concern for the accounting profession.

Clever hackers have many ways of exploiting accountants facing tax filing deadlines, especially when firms have outdated software, vulnerable email systems, and inattentive employees. As the sophistication of hackers and other cyber criminals increases, so do the types of threats and the number and scope of data breaches.

CPA firms are not alone in facing a surge in ransomware attacks on businesses and institutions, ranging from small and medium-sized entities to large organizations. For example, Michigan State University and the University of California at San Francisco have both been victimized, according to media reports. MSU opted not to pay the ransom demanded, a decision that culminated in personal information and financial documents being published online. UCSF opted to pay a \$1.14 million ransom demand to recover malware-encrypted data. A cyberattack also brought Honda car manufacturing to a halt around the world.

Cyber experts have been scrambling to provide security for businesses employing thousands of employees now working from home. With employees connecting from a variety of locations and devices, suspicious activity is difficult to monitor, creating more opportunities for hackers to launch attacks. Ransom amounts demanded by hackers have also been increasing.

TAKE ACTION NOW

It is critical that firms be extra diligent to follow established security measures and safeguards. Remind all employees of the importance of strict adherence to security protocols and established safeguards.

Although not meant to be all-inclusive, the following basic best practice measures are extremely important and should be prioritized:

- **Ensure all software has the latest security options/patches.** This will help protect against malware, viruses, and hacker attacks.
- **Frequently back up all important data and information and verify your backups.** Regular backups reduce the likelihood that critical data is lost in the event of a cyberattack. Protect the backups in a remote or external location, outside of your network, where they are safe from ransomware that seeks out backup copies. Periodically verify that your data backup process is working properly to assure that your data will be recoverable if a crisis occurs.
- **Change and strengthen passwords frequently.** Systems are only as secure as the passwords used to access them.
- **Use two-factor authentication.** This can add an extra level of security to help prevent an account hack, especially when employees work remotely.
- **Slow down to avoid being yet another “phishing scam” victim.** Take the time necessary to validate suspicious or unexpected email. And do not click a link, pop-up or attachment without first hovering your cursor over the link to display the URL to assess its legitimacy. If there is an urgent call to action, rather than clicking on a link, consider a different way to validate the request such as speaking with the sender to get verbal confirmation that the communication is legitimate, or visiting the purported sender's URL.

- **Maintain strong work-from-home cyber hygiene.** Reinforce with employees the cyber protocols to be followed when working remotely (e.g., machine use restrictions, WiFi passwords, VPN, firewalls, etc.)
- **Remind all employees of the importance of powering down computers when not in use.** Computers are not accessible to attacks or intrusions when powered off.

NEXT STEPS – REVIEW AND UPDATE THE FIRM'S INFORMATION (DATA) SECURITY PLAN

The IRS requires tax return preparers to comply with the Gramm-Leach-Bliley Act's ("GLBA") Safeguards Rule, which establishes minimum requirements for protecting sensitive client data. One such requirement is to have in place a written Information (Data) Security Plan ("ISP"), and to periodically review the effectiveness of the program and reassess the risk factors as well as any material changes to the firm's operations.

Periodically assessing the appropriateness of your security measures and safeguards, given any changes that you may have had to your firm's operations, as well as any changes to potential internal and external security risks, are critical steps to ensure your firm's overall cyber preparedness. Set aside some time to review your firm's safeguards and make changes necessary to ensure that you have the right measures in place to protect your clients' information.

Special attention should be given to ensure that your firm continues to prioritize appropriate firm-wide cybersecurity awareness training. Your scheduled training may have been interrupted due to the pandemic, or the training may require updating to address perceived pandemic-related threats to your existing protocols and infrastructure.)

In addition, review and enhance, if necessary, your firm's incident response plan. There is no substitute for taking appropriate cybersecurity precautions, but it is also important to plan for the worst and have in place a comprehensive incident response plan.

Note that a firm's efforts to comply with the GLBA Safeguards Rule is an organization-specific initiative. As such, CAMICO recommends that each firm work with its IT/cyber specialists and legal counsel, as appropriate, to modify and tailor the firm's incident response plan to ensure compliance with GLBA's Safeguards Rule and other applicable laws.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Refer to the IRS website for detailed guidance at <https://www.irs.gov/identity-theft-fraud-scams/identity-theft-information-for-tax-professionals>. You can also refer to the *IRS Publication 4557, Safeguarding Taxpayer Data*, for additional guidance. This publication details critical security measures that all tax professionals should have in place.

Randy R. Werner, J.D., LL.M./Tax, CPA, is a Loss Prevention Executive with CAMICO (www.camico.com). She responds to CAMICO loss prevention hotline inquiries and speaks to CPA groups on various topics. Werner has Big Four public accounting experience in federal and state tax as well as regional accounting firm experience. She practiced as a sole practitioner in estate planning beginning in 1984.

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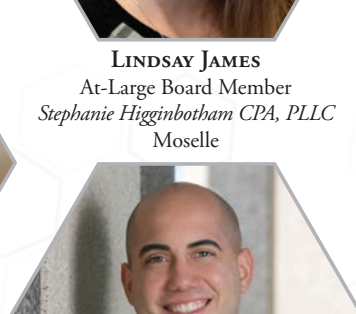
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CHAPTER NEWS

CENTRAL CHAPTER

The MSCPA Central Chapter held a lunch and learn meeting August 3 livestream and in person at the MSCPA Training Center in Ridgeland. CPE speakers were Michael Michlitsch of Valmark Financial Group, George Pickett of the Centerpoint Group, and Rob Zischke of HORNE LLP. MSCPA Central Chapter members also voted to elect new Central Chapter Board of Governors representatives.

Due to the pandemic which disrupted Central Chapter activities last year, the 2020 officers have agreed to serve another term.

President: Rob Zischke, HORNE LLP

Vice-President/Programs: Mary Margaret White, HORNE LLP

Vice-President/Membership: Ed Simmons, Benefit Administration Services, Ltd.

Secretary: Lydia Windham, Municipal Energy Agency of MS

Treasurer: Walker Roberts, BKD

Returning Board of Governors Representatives with one year left on term:

Philando Brown, MS Department of Finance & Administration

Blair Jussely, Butler Snow

David Lynch, Lynch Law Firm

The following were elected as Board of Governors Representatives for two year terms.

Domina Kaler, Haddox Reid

Ed Simmons, Benefit Administration Services, Ltd.

Rob Zischke, HORNE LLP



GULF COAST

The MSCPA Gulf Coast Chapter hosted a Family Fun Day on Saturday, July 31, at the Southern Miss Gulf Park campus in Long Beach. Gulf Coast CPAs, CPA candidates, and accounting students enjoyed tacos from Capt Coconut's food truck, Pop Brothers popsicles, and a face painting station and an inflatable bouncy house for the kids.

Gulf Coast Chapter Officers and Directors:

Kim Allison, President; Mary Bui, Vice President; Maria Saylor, Secretary; Richard Brown, Treasurer; Marv Boullion, At-Large; Monica Dean, At-Large; and Moises Espinal, At-Large.



CONFERENCES

ANNUAL HEALTH CARE SERVICES CONFERENCE

**FRIDAY,
SEPT. 24,
2021**

Livestream and In Person at the MSCPA Training Center in Ridgeland

This event is designed to meet the specific interests of CPAs and financial professionals who provide services to hospitals, physician practices, and long-term care facilities.

Co-sponsored by the Mississippi Chapter of the HFMA

Credits: 8 | Cost: \$215 | Register online at www.ms-cpa.org

AGENDA

8:00 AM - 8:30 AM

Registration & Continental Breakfast

Sponsored by HORNE

8:30 AM - 9:30 AM

Keynote Address: HFMA National Update

*Suzette Duhe, CFO, UHS-Gulfport Behavioral Health System
HFMA - Incoming Regional Executive Elect*

9:30 AM - 10:45 AM

*The Year of COVID - Baptist Health Systems
Chris Anderson, Vice President Mississippi Operations
Nick Lewis, Baptist System Director for Environmental Safety
Rob Coleman, CEO for Baptist Attala and Baptist Yazoo
Justin Rhodes, Chief Administrative Officer for Connected Care*

10:45 AM - 11:00 AM

Morning Break

Sponsored by Grantham Poole

11:00 AM - 12:00 PM

COVID Hot Topics - Rewind

*Andy Williams, Anita Goodrum, & Shane Hariel
Partners at BKD, WWS, and CRI respectively*

12:00 PM - 12:45 PM

Lunch Break

Sponsored by BKD

12:45 PM - 2:00 PM

Panel Discussion: Health Equity

*David Williams, Partner, Carr Riggs and Ingram
Warren Jones, UMMC Public Health
Dr. Thomas Dobbs, State Health Officer
Tim Moore, President & CEO, Mississippi Hospital Association*

2:00 PM - 3:00 PM

Medicaid Update

*Drew Snyder, Executive Director, Office of the Governor
MS Division of Medicaid*

3:00 PM - 3:15 PM

Afternoon Break

Sponsored by Harper Rains Knight & Company

3:15 PM - 4:30 PM

Ransomware VIRTUAL

*Justin Daniels & Layna Rush
Shareholders at Baker Donelson*

SPONSORED BY





CREDITS:
08

COST:
\$180

REGISTER ONLINE AT
WWW.MS-CPA.ORG

MSCPA ANNUAL INDUSTRY CONFERENCE

FRIDAY, OCTOBER 22, 2021

LIVESTREAM AND IN PERSON (*LIMITED*)
AT THE MSCPA TRAINING CENTER IN RIDGELAND

This event is designed to approach critical topics from the perspective of a CFO, controller, manager or accountant from the inside of a business or industry position.

MSCPA ANNUAL ACCOUNTING EDUCATION CONFERENCE

FRIDAY OCTOBER 29, 2021

This annual event updates accounting educators on accounting industry trends and equips them to help their students succeed.

LIVESTREAM AND IN PERSON (*limited*) at the MSCPA Training Center in Ridgeland

CREDITS: 8 COST: \$100 REGISTER ONLINE: WWW.MS-CPA.ORG

MSCPA Annual NOT-FOR-PROFIT Conference

**THURSDAY
NOV
16
2021**

LIVESTREAM AND IN PERSON (*LIMITED*) at the MSCPA Training Center in Ridgeland

Get the industry-specific insights you need to maintain a strong organization for you or your clients and get informed about unique challenges facing not-for-profit organizations at this annual event.

Register Online:
WWW.MS-CPA.ORG

CREDITS: 8

COST : \$125

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2021 CPE AT A GLANCE

BEGIN	DAY	NEW	COURSE TITLE	CITY	LOCATION	LIVESTREAM	AICPA	MEM	NON MEM	CPE HRS	RECOM'D CATEGORY
Sep 24	F		Health Care Services Conference	Ridgeland	MSCPA Center			215	215	8	Gen
Oct 18	M		Annual Update for Accountants and Auditors	Ridgeland	MSCPA Center		30	280	350	8	A&A
Oct 19	T		Annual Update and Practice Issues for Preparation, Compilation	Ridgeland	MSCPA Center		30	280	350	8	A&A
Oct 22	F		Industry Conference	Ridgeland	MSCPA Center			180	255	8	Gen
Oct 26	T	New	Choice of Entity	Ridgeland	MSCPA Center			160	200	4	Tax
Oct 26	T	New	Estate & Trust	Ridgeland	MSCPA Center			160	200	4	Tax
Oct 27	W		Annual Update for Controllers	Ridgeland	MSCPA Center		30	280	350	8	A&A
Oct 29	F		Accounting Education Conference	Ridgeland	MSCPA Center			100	100	8	Gen
Nov 1	M		S Corporations: Key Issues, Compliance, and Tax Strategies	Ridgeland	MSCPA Center		30	280	350	8	Tax
Nov 2-3	T-W		1040 Tax Return Workshop	Ridgeland	MSCPA Center		60	395	545	16	Tax
Nov 4	Th		Advanced Topics in a Single Audit	Hattiesburg	Trent Lott Center		30	280	350	8	A&A/YB
Nov 4	Th		AICPA's Federal Tax Update	Hattiesburg	Trent Lott Center		30	280	350	8	Tax
Nov 5	F		Ethics, Rules, and Regulations	Hattiesburg	Trent Lott Center			160	200	4	Ethics
Nov 5	F		Fraud in Plain Sight	Hattiesburg	Trent Lott Center			160	200	4	A&A
Nov 5	F		This Year's Best Income Tax, Estate Tax, and Financial-Planning	Hattiesburg	Trent Lott Center			280	350	8	Tax
Nov 10	W		Evaluating Fraud Risk in a Financial Statement Audit	Tupelo	BancorpSouth Conf			160	200	4	A&A
Nov 10	W		Avoiding Deficiencies in Peer Reviews: Focus on Engagement Quality	Tupelo	BancorpSouth Conf			160	200	4	A&A
Nov 10	W		Ethics, Rules, and Regulations	Tupelo	BancorpSouth Conf			160	200	4	Ethics
Nov 10	W		Fraud in Plain Sight	Tupelo	BancorpSouth Conf			160	200	4	A&A
Nov 11	Th		Financial Statement Disclosures: A Guide for Small	Tupelo	BancorpSouth Conf			160	200	4	A&A
Nov 11	Th		AICPA's Federal Tax Update	Tupelo	BancorpSouth Conf		30	280	350	8	Tax
Nov 11	Th		Technology Trends and Hot Topics Impacting the Accounting Profession	Tupelo	BancorpSouth Conf			160	200	4	A&A/Gen
Nov 12	F		The Top Five Tax Issues in Dealing with LLCs and Partnerships	Oxford	Graduate Oxford			160	200	4	Tax
Nov 12	F		Surgent's Essential Depreciation and Expensing Update	Oxford	Graduate Oxford			160	200	4	Tax
Nov 16	T		Not-for-Profit Conference	Ridgeland	MSCPA Center			125	125	8	Gen
Nov 18	Th		Business Valuation and Litigation Services Conference	Ridgeland	MSCPA Center			185	260	8	Gen
Dec 1-2	W-Th		Mississippi Tax Institute	Ridgeland	MSCPA Center			300	300	12	Tax
Dec 13	M		Ethics, Rules, and Regulations	Biloxi	Golden Nugget			160	200	4	Ethics
Dec 13	M		Social Security and Medicare: Maximizing Retirement Benefits	Biloxi	Golden Nugget			160	200	4	Tax
Dec 14	T		AICPA's Federal Tax Update	Biloxi	Golden Nugget		30	280	350	8	Tax
Dec 15	W		Ethics, Rules, and Regulations	Ridgeland	MSCPA Center			160	200	4	Ethics
Dec 16	Th		AICPA's Federal Tax Update	Ridgeland	MSCPA Center		30	280	350	8	Tax

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Knoxville, TN – Gross \$600k

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SE Nashville Suburb – Gross \$336k – SOLD

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Jackson CPA firm is seeking staff with a bachelor's degree in accounting and 3-5 years of experience in auditing. Also seeking recent accounting graduates. Firm serves a broad range of clients in the central Mississippi area. Please send resume to kmoody@ms-cpa.org. All resumes will be strictly confidential.



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