

By Jeffrey Albrechtson

Certification Drives Membership in the Middle East

One area of the world where the Institute of Management Accountants (IMA®) is experiencing rapid growth is the Middle East. Currently, IMA has close to 4,500 members in the region. Over the past five years, IMA membership in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), an economic and political policy-coordinating forum for the six member states of Bahrain, Kuwait,

Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates, and surrounding countries has doubled. It's apparent that CMA® certification is the driving force behind this growth.

The Middle East is a vast region comprising the lands that extend from the eastern Mediterranean Sea to the Persian Gulf. This is an interesting part of the world culturally, historically, and visually. While we all hear much about the Middle East, we forget how vast the region is. There are 22 countries and territories found there. IMA membership is spread out across the region, with members in Bahrain (216 members), Egypt (926), Jordan (514), Kuwait (326), Oman (70), Qatar (79), Saudi Arabia (933), and the UAE (1,266).

Why has IMA grown in this part

of the world? Quite simply: the challenge of bettering one's career with knowledge and experience. This is evident by the number of members in the region who are seeking the Certified Management Accountant/Certified Financial Manager certifications made available by a large network of testing centers. More and more international companies are opening offices in cities such as Dubai, UAE, and are requiring their finance and accounting professionals to have international certifications. Moreover, interaction with the international market requires financial professionals to be aware of the international financial and accounting trends and to be proficient in the skills demanded at the international level.

Professor Fadi Kattan, CMA, CFM, chair of the accounting department at Bethlehem University in Palestine and an IMA member, explains, "I believe the materials covered on the CMA exam bring so many concepts that are vital to understanding the way a business could be run more efficiently and effectively. These issues are not only valid in the U.S. but in all countries around the globe. Businesses are now interacting with each other as if there are no borders."

Another member, Irfan Hassan, CFM, notes that "CMA/CFM certifications are increasingly being demanded by international employers due to their high relevance to work and applied, practical coverage of accounting and finance topics. If you are seeking a job promotion in your organization, the CMA/CFM will help you achieve your goals by developing your skills for the higher-level position."

IMA staff members have visited the Middle East in the past year in an effort to meet our members and to foster the growth of our community throughout the region. The Institute also has embarked on various introductory and member service

events in the Middle East. The building of our relations in the region is essential for our success and to sustain our members and presence throughout this region.

At present, there are two IMA chapters in the Middle East. One is in Dubai, which is quickly becoming a financial capital of the Middle East, and the other is in Bethlehem, Palestine, an ancient land rich with history. Interest has surfaced for additional chapters in Bahrain, Egypt, Jordan, Kuwait, and Abu Dhabi, UAE.

To bring added value and a stronger sense of community and learning to our members, the IMA will be conducting its first global management accounting conference in Dubai (please visit www.ima.dubai.org) on May 7-10, 2006. Attendance is anticipated to exceed 700 people. This event isn't just for IMA members in the Middle East region but for all of our global members, including those in the United States. ■