

I've Never Looked Back

By John J. Mesko, CMA, CPA



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My IMA career didn't get started until March 1975 when I read about a Certified Management Accountant (CMA®) examination and a review course being held at the University of Southern California. Public accounting never really interested me, so this management accounting idea was right up my alley.

At the review course, I had the privilege of meeting John Pollara (who would later become IMA Chair). John invited me to join the South East Los Angeles Chapter, of which he was a member, and I accepted. (Now it's the San Gabriel Valley Chapter.) I passed the CMA exam and became certified in 1976, and I've never looked back.

My involvement with the Chapter and my CMA designation paid almost immediate dividends. In 1976, the company that I worked for was downsizing and closing our local plant. A fellow Chapter member, a CPA, had a client who was looking for a CFO. I was hired during the first interview. I'm convinced that my Chapter participation and, in particular, my CMA designation were significant factors in getting this position.

The monthly meetings provided many great networking opportunities. We had company presidents, owners, bankers, CPAs, and retail and wholesale accountants in our Chapter, just to name a few. When I speak to student groups, I point out this positive networking opportunity. Our students may be sitting next to a very successful company president, vice president of finance, college professor, or CPA. Such nonthreatening situ-

ations provide them a wonderful opportunity to rub elbows with these important businesspeople, and the meetings help remove some of the mystique surrounding people in high positions. These experiences will serve the students well in future real-life situations.

The head of the Accounting Department at Whittier College also was a Chapter member. When I asked about being a part-time instructor although I didn't have a master's degree, he said "yes" almost immediately, and Whittier accepted my CMA as an equivalent to an MBA. I was afforded this truly outstanding experience because of IMA and the CMA.

As I progressed through the chairs of my Chapter, I became aware of the regional councils (mine is the Wild West Council) and national (now global) committees. My participation at the council level allowed me to be a member of several committees over the years, and they have made a difference in the organization. The "top" people listened to the "grassroots" people. It may have taken some time and perseverance at the grassroots level, but I've seen many good changes made as IMA works to stay with the changing times.

Does it sound like I'm sold on IMA and the CMA? You bet. IMA has been and continues to be a great organization, and I recommend pursuit of the CMA designation as well as membership.

My IMA career has been a wonderful trip. I can't thank John Pollara enough for getting me involved. We're still friends to this day. **SF**