

Message from the Chair
By John C. Macaulay, CMA



Insights from the Middle East

Because IMA® members live and work in so many diverse locations around the world, it's easy to forget how similar we management accountants really are. My recent trip helped me remember.

I recently returned from an eye-opening trip, my first to the Middle East as IMA® Chair and my first to this part of the world in more than 30 years. That experience gave me extra insight into IMA's global mission and the many challenges and opportunities we face in the region.

Guided by the very capable Jim Gurowka, IMA vice president of international development, and the helpful staff of our Middle East office, I spent nine days in seven cities in the United Arab Emirates, Qatar, and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. The overall goal of the trip was to meet with various groups, corporations, and educational and financial institutions interested in IMA and our well-respected CMA® (Certified Management Accountant) certification, as well as to become acquainted with our staff and partners in the area.

My schedule was filled with meetings arranged by the IMA staff and Morgan International Training, one of our key training partners in the region. During

many of these sessions, I talked about the “skills gap” between what employers want from their accounting and finance staff and what employees can deliver, and I described IMA's efforts to close this gap. I also discussed IMA and the CMA at several prominent corporations, including Al Jazeera, a leading independent news agency; Azizia Panda United Company, the largest grocery chain in Saudi Arabia; and Saudi Arabian Amiantit Company, a manufacturer and supplier of pipes and related products and technologies, which, thanks to arrangements by a member of the IMA Global Board of Directors, hosted a gathering of more than 30 senior accounting and finance professionals.

And I got to visit with faculty, staff, and students at several renowned universities, including the College of Industrial Management at the King Fahd University of Petroleum & Minerals, Prince Sultan University, Alfaisal University, and the United Arab Emirates University.

I also participated in meetings of the IMA Eastern Province Chapter in Dammam and the IMA Riyadh Chapter—where I delivered my talk about the skills gap and had the opportunity to honor candi-

dates who had earned their CMA certification during the past year.

Two important truths emerged from my visit:

First, there's a clear and growing demand for certification in this region. Many individuals are drawn to our CMA credential because it's awarded by an internationally recognized, U.S.-based organization and because the skills candidates gain by preparing for the exam help them in their careers over the long term. They also are aware of the financial advantages that certification offers, not only for better jobs but also for higher salaries (up to 80% higher than the salaries of those who aren't certified, according to our recent IMA Middle East Salary Survey published in the November 2012 issue of this magazine). Many individuals and organizations are attracted to IMA's networking and continuing education opportunities as well.

Second, I got to observe for myself the remarkable similarities and notable differences between this region and my own in the United States. It became very apparent to me that today's management accountants face many of the same challenges no matter where they live or in what industry

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they work. I'm pleased to report that the desire to add value to an organization, to acquire skills in decision support and control, and to serve as an important strategic advisor to management are amazingly universal.

At the same time, however, the culture of this region remains quite different from that of the United States. Because IMA is an organization committed to serving the management accounting profession worldwide, it's imperative that we tailor our services and products, as well as their delivery, to meet the unique needs of our individual member markets. How we go about doing that will continue to be a challenge for our organization—for our product development team, our corporate development team, our member services team, our communications team, and our leadership team, both staff and volunteer. But only with this level of focus and commitment to meeting the unique needs of all of our members can we truly and successfully fulfill our mission of advancing our profession around the world.

As always, I invite your comments on this or any other subject at jmacaulay@imanet.org. **SF**