

Addition of CGFM After Name Shifts Career Into High Gear

Shaun M. Bridge, CGFM, was rewarded in advance for passing the three CGFM Examinations. Bridge, 36, was working as an Accounting Technician in the Everett, WA engineering department when he was asked to apply for a Financial Analyst position in the parks department that came with more responsibilities and more money. He had passed CGFM Exam 1 when the interview was scheduled. Even though Bridge had not passed all three Exams, his supervisor was confident that he could earn the credential and Bridge was hired.

Bridge said he was competing against professionals who had been with the city longer and who had a stronger educational background. "What has continually set me apart is my association with AGA. I know being a member of AGA as well as participating in the CGFM Program has enhanced my opportunities for promotion."

In fact, the parks department job was not the first promotion he had received from the city. He had been promoted once before, and his supervisor told him that his commitment to certification gave him the edge.

He first began working for Everett in 2000 as an Accounting Assistant in the accounting department. During that interview he mentioned that he was dedicated to continuing education, professional development and that he was a member of AGA—he had joined while still earning his undergraduate degree in public administration at Western Washington University. The accounting manager who hired him was a CGFM herself, and she gave Bridge information on the CGFM certification and encouraged him to pursue it. Bridge needed to get two years of professional experience under his belt before he would be eligible for the program, so he continued his schooling and took on additional responsibilities at work.

When a position opened in the engineering department, Bridge talked about his "absolute determination" to earn the CGFM during his job interview. Once again, he was hired, this time over six highly qualified applicants. All of the candidates had a college education and worked hard. "None of them had a professional affiliation and none of them was working on a certification program," Bridge said. "My new supervisor said later that my commitment to professional development made me a stronger candidate."

At that point, Bridge began working toward the CGFM in earnest. He took all three CGFM Training Courses, which AGA offers in partnership with Management Concepts, Inc. The courses were taught in Seattle by a retired auditor from the General Accounting Office (GAO), Dexter Peach, and Bridge said his professionalism and expertise was invaluable. He also met a colleague from the Whatcom Council of Governments, Ron Cubellis, now a CGFM as well, and together they studied and shared resources.

Bridge got his current job just after passing Exam 1 in October, but he wasn't so quick to dive into Exam 2, Governmental Accounting, Financial Reporting and Budgeting, after hearing from Cubellis how challenging it was. "I took a very disciplined, systematic approach to pass that test," he said. He built his own resource library from the review materials listed on AGA's website, and studied two to three hours a night for six weeks.

"I passed it, but I will also say had it not been for the incredible amount of time invested in preparation for passing, I don't think I would have," he said. At that point, he felt unstoppable, and passed his last exam Jan. 31.

Bridge takes personal pride in his accomplishment, and has also been enjoying the recognition of his CPA and CIA colleagues who recognize the achievement of earning a professional certification.

With the CGFM certification comes the requirement for 80 hours of continuing professional education every two years, but that's no problem for Bridge, whose dedication to learning may be in his genes. His mother, though nearing retirement, is still going to school. Bridge is now mulling whether to get a master's degree. He believes the adage, "use it or lose it," doesn't only apply to physical agility, but intellectual agility as well.

Bridge is very pleased with the number of promotions he's received in his short career with the city of Everett, and he believes his pursuit of the CGFM credential made them happen. "My career has come a long way in a short time," he said.

Bridge waited until he passed all three CGFM Examinations to print his new business cards—now he can include "CGFM" after his name. He also plans to display his CGFM certificate. "Now I don't have to worry about studying, I just have to worry about what color frame to buy." — by Christina Camara