

## CGFM Profile

### **Defense Employee Finds Support at the Top for Certification and Professional Education**

To show how the Certified Government Financial Manager (CGFM) designation has made a difference for those who have been certified, AGA offers these personal insights into the CGFM Program.

Carmen Covey always thought that a master's degree in business would be enough to satisfy any job requirements in her field, but a quick scan of the government's job postings told her otherwise.

"When you look within the financial management community, so many of the job announcements are asking for applicants with a CPA or a CGFM," she said.

In fact, the first time she applied for her current job, she was not selected, in part, because she didn't have the required certifications.

So Covey went to work. In the space of a year, she became a CPA, a CGFM and a Certified Defense Financial Manager (CDFM). She passed the three rigorous CGFM Exams in June of 1999 and was hired as special assistant to the Deputy Chief Financial Officer (DCFO) at the U.S. Department of Defense in the same month.

Covey has extensive background in the Defense community. She has worked in the budget, accounting and finance areas. She's worked for the Defense Finance and Accounting Service (DFAS), at the Army installation level, including 11 years in Europe, and in the office of the Chief Financial Officer of the Defense Department.

Even so, Covey found that it wasn't until she was detailed to the DCFO office from DFAS that she was strongly encouraged to earn professional certifications by her boss, Nelson E. Toye, also a CGFM.

"Until I came to this organization, there really was no emphasis placed on it or support of it," she said. That being the case, it would have been impossible to earn the required continuing professional education hours to maintain any certification. Toye was different.

He gave her time to do the preparatory work she needed. "Despite the fact that under normal conditions I work a lot of late hours, while I was preparing for the exams my boss would push me out the door on time every night. He was super, super supportive," she said. When she passed all the exams the first time around, "I think he was more excited than I was," Covey said. Support didn't end there, though. Covey said he is committed to helping all of his employees get the training they need to maintain their certifications.

Toye participated in the beta testing phase of the new CDFM, and Covey joined him, earning that certification early this year. Covey also joined a number of other DCFO employees in taking a CPA review course, paid for by their employer, and after extensive study, passed that exam this past May.

"It was a long year," she said, noting that she had worked in government since earning her bachelor's degree in 1976. With no exposure to public accounting in 25 years, the idea of becoming a CPA was more than a little daunting. She came to work an hour early and did homework. She left work on time, and did homework when she got home. Weekends? More studying.

The CGFM Exams also were daunting in their own way. The CGFM covers a broad range of financial management areas, including state and local government, and Covey had no experience

in that arena. The review courses were “wonderful,” she said, and helped her prepare for the comprehensive exams. In fact, she recommends the courses, even to those who have already earned the certification. She also found the state and local government information to be “really eye-opening.”

Covey said she now feels more prepared for promotion opportunities. The certifications have given her more self-confidence, and she said she applies the knowledge she has gained to her daily work, which covers a gamut of issues.

She said she would “absolutely” encourage others to earn professional certifications. “Even if you work in an organization that doesn’t promote it, someday you might want to work in an organization that does,” she said.

She did find one down side to earning the CGFM, the CDFM and CPA in one year: “I had to change my business cards and put all my certifications on a separate line. It got too long.” – CGFM Profiles by Christina M. Camara