

## **Young Professional Adds Clout With CGFM**

Michael Herrera, CGFM, CPA, is a big step ahead of the young people who are just starting their careers in government financial management.

Though Herrera graduated just five years ago, he not only has the benefit of on-the-job experience, but the knowledge gained from earning his CGFM certification.

Herrera audits local governments for Heinfeld Meech and Co., a small private firm in Tucson, AZ. He said that when you're just starting out in your career, it's easy to work with blinders on without understanding the entire process. "I see that a lot with young folks who come in out of college—they know the building blocks, but not how to put them all together."

The CGFM certification process gave him the foundation to understand the bigger picture, he said. A member of AGA's Phoenix Chapter, Herrera said he encourages his colleagues to become CGFMs and active members of professional associations.

Herrera started his career with the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), working as a staff accountant at a medical facility in Tucson. Once he attained the CPA certification after graduation in 1997, he looked to the CGFM.

"It just seemed like the logical thing to do," he said. Both of his managers at the VA were CGFMs and the CFO encouraged him to get the credential as well. The VA backed its support with dollars, paying for his exam fees.

Herrera was just two years into his professional career when he looked up the appropriate reference materials on AGA's website, studied on his own and passed the three CGFM exams in one day—giving him a boost of confidence and momentum that he brought to his work.

The exams covered issues Herrera faces every day—single audits, the federal funding process, General Accounting Office standards and more. Knowledge is tested on all aspects of financial management in the local, state and federal arenas.

Herrera said that because the certification is specific to government financial management, the credential has been a big help in his dealings with his local government clients. "The CPA is very broad, of course. When you have the CGFM alongside that, it reinforces to our clients and our prospective clients that that's what I'm serious about doing." It certainly adds credibility, he said. "It's a designation for governmental accountants so I think that stands on its own." - by Christina Camara