

## **CGFM A True Believer In Continuing Professional Education**

As AGA's Certified Government Financial Manager (CGFM) certification started gaining prominence, Robert James decided that he, too, needed to demonstrate his knowledge in the field by taking the three CGFM Exams.

James said he strongly believes that professional accountants should become certified. "I wanted some certification, and the CGFM is more important to have than the CPA because it's more relevant to my job," he said.

James, who is the acting financial reports officer at the Library of Congress and a member of AGA's Washington, D.C. Chapter, also got plenty of support from his boss, John Webster, who is a Past National Treasurer of AGA.

Webster and James both firmly believe in continuing professional education, which is a requirement of maintaining the CGFM credential. CGFMs must earn 80 CPE hours every two years.

"You can't be a professional in financial management unless you maintain your education—things are changing too fast," Webster said, adding that certification also helps individual employees by putting them above the crowd.

In fact, James passed the three exams over the course of about a year, and was promoted from his senior operating accountant position soon after that. The certification may not have been the prime factor in the promotion, but James said "it certainly helped."

James said his employer was so supportive, that the agency paid for the three courses in the CGFM Training Series, jointly offered by AGA and Management Concepts. The three courses are often used to prepare for the three CGFM exams, but can also be taken to sharpen skills in a wide range of topics: accounting, financial reporting, budgeting, internal and management control processes, performance measurement and reporting processes, and more. James was able to take eight days off work to go through the training courses, and he was also given administrative time off to take the exams, which he paid for himself.

As acting financial reports officer, James handles all external reporting, including financial statements. He believes earning the certification has certainly helped him perform his day-to-day duties, particularly in his interactions with auditors and management, as he now has a much better grasp of those topics thanks to his training.

"Bob is a tremendous asset to this organization," said Webster, "not only as an accountant, but as a person."

James recommends the training courses—he found the experience of the instructors and the classroom environment to be stimulating—and he also advises candidates to tackle each exam independently. He took the first course in April of 1999 and passed the exam a few weeks later. He took Courses 2 and 3 in June of 2000. He took the exams two weeks apart and studied the course booklets, which consolidated many different resources into one concise study guide. The multiple-choice exams themselves were somewhat grueling, especially the state and local sections, James said, but he passed all three the first time.

Now James is encouraging two others in his office to consider the CGFM certification. It tests a broad range of financial management topics in all levels of government, and its continuing professional education requirement keeps financial managers at the top of their game. – by Christina M. Camara