

[Back](#)

Accounting firm builds growth over 75 years

A closer look

By **Judy Waggoner**

For *Fox Valley INc.* November 6, 2005

Today's accountant has long forsaken the profession's old-fashioned image of shirtsleeve garters, pen-filled pocket protector and eyeshades.

Nevertheless, by building on traditions established by a single certified public accountant, one Appleton-based regional accounting and consulting firm — Schenck Business Solutions — has notched 75 years in business.

Willard J. Schenck formed an Appleton CPA sole proprietorship in 1930 and through a succession of mergers and acquisitions, his firm has grown to more than 500 employees and 11 Wisconsin offices.

"As our clients have grown, Schenck has grown," said William Goodman, who became president of Schenck Business Solutions in December 2003.

"We try to understand the business of our existing clients, and we have a tremendous network of other service providers," he said.

As the 30th largest CPA firm in the nation, Schenck provides a wide range of services, including accounting and auditing, tax filing, corporate finance, business consulting, information technology, payroll preparation, retirement planning, investment management and advice for middle market and smaller privately held Wisconsin companies.

"We try to be a business advisor to the small business owner, but we can't do everything for everybody," Goodman said. "Our bread and butter are Wisconsin-based companies."

Robert De Bruin joined Schenck 27 years ago and was made managing partner of the Appleton office in 1998.

"I joined Schenck in late 1978 and we had 32 people in Appleton and a small Fond du Lac office," De Bruin said. "The next year, we opened an office in Sheboygan; we were expanding our services as well as our geographical locations."

With nearly six decades of collective accounting experience, Goodman and De Bruin have seen dramatic changes in the industry.

"(Accountants) used to be a tight-knit group, more like a brotherhood," De Bruin said. "We actually loaned people to other CPA firms in the area; it's a different world now."

Despite a swing toward more aggressive competition between accounting firms, Schenck has been able to maintain a low employee turnover rate at all levels, De Bruin said. "Industry trend is about 20 percent turnover; we run below 10 percent, which is still too high," Goodman said.

With a corporate logo that says, "Better people, Better results," Schenck's biggest obstacle to success in the

next 75 years seems to be recruiting and retaining qualified employees.

"We have embarked on an 'employer of choice' initiative," said Goodman, adding that Schenck has extensive on-campus recruitment and seeks to hire experienced personnel to fill niche markets.

"Wisconsin is blessed with wonderful accounting programs at the university level," he said.

A stereotypical "bean-counter" image may be one of ultra-conservative rigidity, but Schenck has lasted 75 years by being able to temper that with progressive, forward-looking leadership.

"Accountants have to be careful and thorough; it's the nature of our business to make sure our 'Is' are dotted," said Diane Roundy, director of business development.

Judy Waggoner can be reached at pcbusiness@postcrescent.com.