



# Certes Financial Pros

FINANCIAL FREEDOM

After Karen Oman was laid off from a senior financial analyst position more than a dozen years ago, she landed some freelance gigs doing high-level financial work. Soon, she was fielding phone calls from clients asking if she could refer additional financial professionals to them. An idea and a company were born.

Certes Financial Pros, the St. Louis Park-based company that Oman founded in 1994, specializes in placing CFOs, CPAs, and other high-level financial professionals in temporary and permanent positions. When she started her business, corporate downsizing was placing heavy demands on financial experts. Oman hoped that she could provide them with more opportunities for a better work-life balance, and thus more control over their lives.

"Accounting has been traditionally seen as an 'extreme' profession," says Dori Estrella, Certes communications manager. "It's the nature of the culture. When you're working 70-plus hours a week, it takes a toll personally, professionally, and physically."

"Certes" originates from a Latin word that can be loosely defined as truth and certainty. "We provide a warm, welcoming environment where contractors can put their own needs first," says Sally Mainquist, a longtime senior vice president at Certes. "They tell us how many hours they'd like to work, how much they'd like to be earning, and where they'd like to be working. We also provide comprehensive benefits and free use of five vacation homes around the country. Plus, they can take as much as six months off without losing their health benefits. All that enables them to focus on putting their best work first; and when they do that, our clients win, too."



Karen Oman (left) and Sally Mainquist offer less hectic lives for financial professionals.

skilled professionals who hit the ground running," Mainquist says. "Little or no training is required. In fact, our contractors are often over-qualified for projects they work on. In many cases, our contractors will even train the new person when the company decides to hire permanently."

She adds that "With our perks and philosophy, we've been able to maintain an average tenure of four years—a rarity in the contracting world." The company's screening process, Mainquist says, "means that we average hiring just one out of 10 applicants." Many of Certes's contractors view contracting as a way of life rather than a bridge between jobs.

Mainquist notes that the candidates Certes places through its permanent division often become its clients. "We've positioned ourselves to be a bridge to a better life for all financial professionals, because at any point in their careers, they could come

Certes's corporate clients "get highly

to us as either a client or an employee," she says. Mainquist recalls one client who "struggled to make it to one soccer game a year for his kids" before joining Certes. "Now he coaches the team."

With 50 percent annual compounded growth since inception, and projected 2007 revenues of \$20 million, Certes has been so successful that Oman has had time to pursue her interests in writing and speaking. (She focuses primarily on work-life balance and trends in the accounting profession.) In May, she turned over her duties as president and CEO to Mainquist.

"My other pursuits were taking me in a new professional direction, and I started to pull away from the day-to-day operations," Oman says. "I realized that it was a great time to pass the torch on to Sally." In starting and building her company, Oman has found some work-life balance of her own.