



Spotlight on OML Members

Our affiliate membership is composed of organizations and firms statewide that recognize the importance of supporting local government. This month we'd like to introduce you to Crawford & Associates, an affiliate member since 1994.

Affiliate member in the Spotlight

Crawford & Associates: Hometown auditors with a worldwide reputation

When Mike Crawford started up his one-man consulting firm for local governments back in 1984, he never imagined that in 20 years it would grow to a fifteen-member team with consulting projects from Oklahoma to Guam, Saipan, Micronesia and the Marshall Islands. And what's even more surprising is that it was the firm's specialization in government accounting — originally intended to serve the needs of governments in central Oklahoma — that has taken them there.

"We decided we wanted a firm with a narrow niche," said Crawford of his decision to specialize in government. "We wanted to do one thing really well, and the decision proved to be way ahead of its time. Now, firms are beginning to realize the importance of specialization," he said.

In addition to providing auditing and accounting services to cities and towns, Crawford & Associates has provided training to other firms that work with governments, both in Oklahoma and in other states. And since 1994, the firm has been training, consulting and auditing for United States territories in the South Pacific.

In response to post-Enron changes in the roles auditors can fill for their clients, Crawford & Associates is making some changes.

"The new rules since Enron limit what auditors can do," said Crawford. "In most small governments now, the auditor can't both prepare and audit financial statements. So we're transitioning our firm from auditing toward working as client advocates, becoming

part of their (a municipality's) staff as the accounting and reporting function," he said. Effective Jan. 1 the firm will have a new program in place through which they can perform all accounting functions for a given municipality. The alternative will be a positive one for many smaller towns, he said, even those who are able to hire a professional accountant. It will eliminate the problems caused by turnover and staff changes due to elected officials leaving office and being replaced. "We'll be able to offer them not only our expertise, but also that continuity that is often missing," he said. He said that the program will offer small towns a more affordable and consistent alternative to hiring a staff member to perform municipal accounting duties.

The Remote Accounting Solution provided to OML members through Crawford and Associates is one that most of our members are familiar with by now. The program offers a totally secure, Internet-based accounting system that can be accessed from any computer and is safe from loss.

"It's very cutting-edge in terms of both technology and functionality," Crawford said. The system allows electronic storage of not only accounting records, but "every piece of paper they have — minutes, ordinances, deeds, resolutions, easements — if it's on paper, it can be imaged and stored electronically," he said. The firm has developed an introductory CD-ROM for anyone who is interested in learning more.

Coming in January, Crawford will be

conducting the annual budget workshop for OML members. The workshop takes participants through every step of the budget process, and has proven to be a favorite among attendees, many of whom come back year after year.

"We try to simplify the budget process to the point where we can talk about each party's role — from the governing body, management, staff and the public," he said. He also said that the workshop is a great opportunity for attendees to meet and share common concerns with their peers from other communities. "There's always lots of discussion, you hear lots of budget war stories," he said. "They realize pretty quickly how they all share the same problems."

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