

Marketplace

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Firm focuses on hometown service

Partners say they started their own accounting business in order to go the extra mile

By JEFF BISHOP
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With the new year comes tax season, and CPAs Tim Higgins and Anne Smith are ready to tackle their first such season as their own independent firm.

Not that Higgins and Smith are novices, mind you. But after working together for another employer, the two decided last fall to venture out on their own. So far, it's been a rewarding experience.

"We just had different ideas about the way we should be doing business, about how clients should be treated," said Smith. "We want to treat our clients the way we want to be treated ourselves, but when you're working for someone else you don't always have the authority to dictate how that's done."

"It's all about customer service," said Higgins. "It's about going the extra mile and taking the time with them to do things right."

Higgins & Smith LLC focuses on individuals and small businesses, providing tax preparation and planning, accounting, auditing and small business consulting.

"We offer a full range of tax services, as well as estate planning, audit work and reviews," said Smith.

The two said they share a commitment to helping clients protect their wealth and provide for the future of their families. They said they want to assist their clients in all life's stages, whether they're ready for a first-time home purchase,

college planning, retirement planning or estate planning.

"When it comes to taxes, sometimes the news is not good," said Higgins. "But you have to communicate early and clearly with your clients. You know, many people don't realize that their biggest expense is their tax bill. But there are things you can do in the planning stage to help with that. And we can help."

They also want to be transparent, and have committed to helping their clients really understand the tax and accounting implications of business and investment decisions.

They aren't hard to find. Higgins and Smith love being on the Court Square in downtown Newnan. Located above Brothers, Ltd., the offices are convenient and have architectural character that newer digs probably would not have.

"I'm not going anywhere other than downtown," said Smith.

The biggest challenge in striking out on your own is all the decisions you're suddenly forced to make, Smith and Higgins agreed.

"So many times when you're working for someone else, you're segmented in what you do — specialized," said Smith.

"And now we're making all the decisions, all the logistics, like what phone system to put in," said Higgins. "We had no background in that."

"So some aspects were a little bit scary," she said.

Getting the word out has been another challenge.

"We just missed the deadline for being in the phone book," said Smith.

"But we've had great word of mouth," he said.

One of the rewards of having your own business is the flexibility that comes with it, they agreed.

"We both have small children, so being able to spend time with our families is great," he said.

"There's definitely more flexibility. I just came back from a teacher appreciation lunch," she said.

But that doesn't prevent the two of them from offering their clients the highest possible level of customer service, they said.

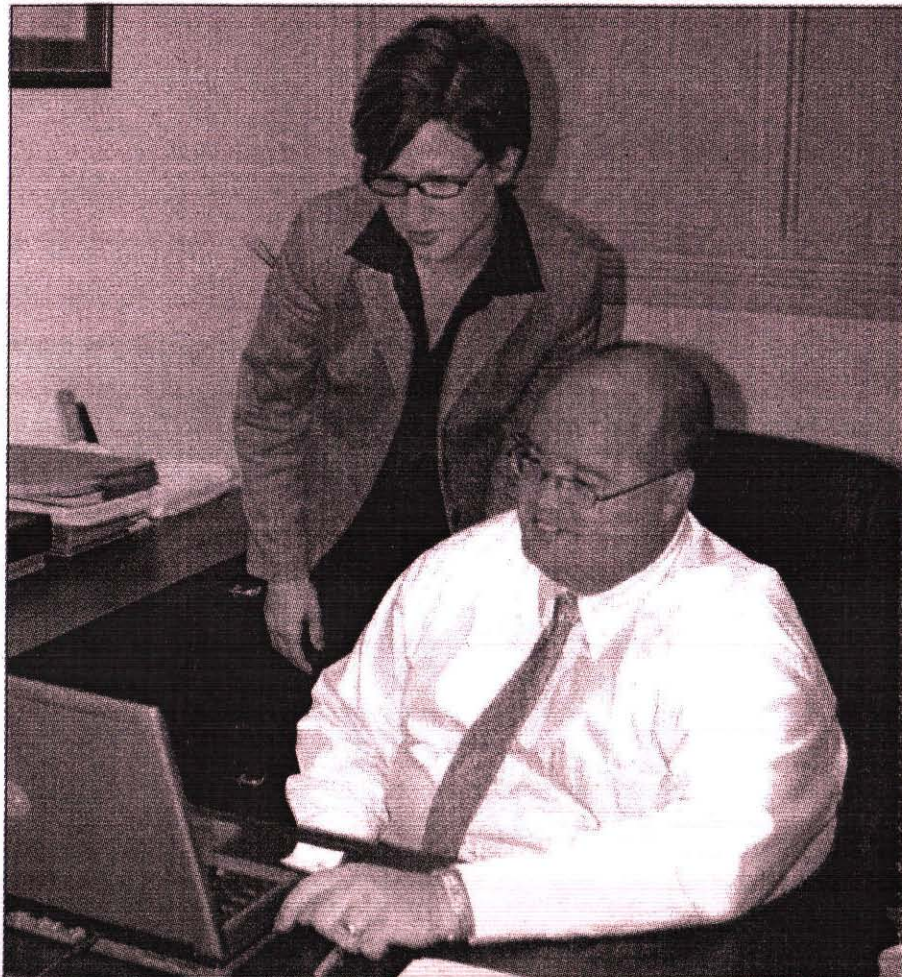
"Our clients won't have to deal with not having their phone calls returned," said Smith. "They won't find themselves in a situation where they're frustrated with not being able to communicate."

"It's not hard to answer an e-mail or return a phone call," said Higgins. "You just have to be consistent with it."

They intend to stay small and personal. That's the way they like it.

"We don't ever want to be a really huge firm," said Smith. "We're all about individual contact."

"We've both dealt with large companies," said Higgins. "We want to work with the people we go to church with, the folks we run into at the grocery store. That's who we want to represent."



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