

*Committed to innovation and excellence throughout his career, Thomas Wells, CPA, JD, LLM, the FICPA 1999 Outstanding CPA in Business and Industry, has continued to make significant contributions to the field of accounting. For nearly a decade, he has demonstrated an ongoing passion and devotion to the advancement of the CPA profession. Today, he's facing new challenges on the Information Superhighway.*



# His Passions Run Deep

Thomas Wells never imagined he would one day head an Internet company. As many sons choose to do, Wells followed in his father's professional footsteps. It was a path that would lead him into the accounting profession. A public accountant for Piggly Wiggly Corporation, a southeastern grocery store chain, Wells' father spent 30 years in the business. It was his influence and encouragement that inspired Wells' career choices. "He told me that it would really make him proud if I became both a lawyer and a CPA, so that's the route I took," Wells explains.

Wells, who says he has always been goal-oriented, planned his professional career from the start. After graduating cum laude, on a soccer scholarship, from the Citadel in 1985, he took and passed the CPA examination on his first try. According to plan, he then went on to obtain his law degree from the University of South Carolina in 1988, but later relocated to Florida, intent on pursuing corporate securities work, which was unavailable to him at the time in South Carolina. Wells accepted a job

with a West Palm Beach law firm, Gunster Yoakley & Stewart.

Wells went back to obtain a tax degree in 1991 and graduated second in his class from the University of Florida Graduate Tax Program in 1992. He enjoyed tremendous professional success practicing law as a shareholder of Zack, Kosnitzky PA and Davis, Devine, Goodman &

Wells. His primary areas of specialization were transactions law, federal and state taxation, securities law, general corporate, partnership and liability company planning, and estate and wealth preservation planning.

*"We thought, hey, why not build an electronic safe deposit box as part of what we're doing," says Wells. "This product will have a great lock-in value."*

Wells is now the founder and CEO of b4bpartner, an Internet software company that provides communications solutions to banks and professional firms. While the majority of his professional career has been carefully planned, Wells decision to leave his law practice to start an internet-based company was made on pure impulse. In May of last year, following the merger of two major Internet healthcare companies, the idea was born.

After researching the market, Wells believed there was a viable opportu-

nity to provide legal services online. Just seven days later, Wells left his job to pursue his new business full-time.

"We originally developed a legal destination site for small business, [www.b4blaw.com](http://www.b4blaw.com)," says Wells. "We raised about a million dollars from local investors here in south Florida on that concept."

However, as most entrepreneurs know, flexibility is key when starting a new business. After painstaking research and analysis, Wells soon realized that most destination sites eventually fell by the wayside. "These sites spend so much in marketing and there's no profit for anybody to come to them," he explained.

One evening as he and his wife Diane watched a Houston Rockets playoff game, a second idea was born. During the course of the game, they asked themselves, "What do attorneys do?"

Of course, attorneys, like accountants, prepare documents for clients, then file those papers away in their own offices, on their own computers, or on their own shelves. Wells envisioned a modern, yet simpler way of organizing people's records and documents. He and his wife believed that clients were non-confrontational, for the most part, and that it was a bother for them to ask

(continued on page 34)

## Tale of the Tape

What does it take to be the FICPA's Outstanding CPA in Business and Industry? Ambition, hard work, and drive are just a few words that describe this year's Outstanding CPA in Business and Industry, Thomas Wells, CPA, JD, LL.M. Here are some of his accomplishments:

- 1999 FICPA Outstanding CPA in Business and Industry
- Board member, Treasurer, Secretary, President, Elect, and President of the FICPA Dade County Chapter
- Past Member of FICPA Board of Governors
- Southeast Regional Accounting Show Committee (1998-99)
- Member of the Florida Bar since 1988
- Board Certified Tax Law Lawyer by the Florida Bar (1997)
- Member of the South Carolina Bar Association
- Member of the American Bar Association
- President of the Greater Miami Tax Institute

## 2000 OUTSTANDING

### CPA in Business & Industry Award

The FICPA invites you to participate in the nomination of candidates for the 2000 Outstanding CPA in Business & Industry Award. This award is designed to recognize the achievements of individual CPAs employed in business and industry, and to promote the CPA designation as the premier professional credential for financial managers.

#### Criteria

Any FICPA member is eligible for nomination. Nominees should be selected based on the following criteria:

- An FICPA member employed in business & industry
- Distinguished by having made a significant contribution to the growth and enhancement of the profession;
- Distinguished by having made a significant contribution to the growth and success of his/her employer organization or a notable entrepreneurial achievement; and
- Currently not serving as president of the CPA society, or as a member of the AICPA Board of Directors, Business and Industry Executive Committee or any of its subcommittees.

Please print

Nominee's Name: \_\_\_\_\_

FICPA Chapter: \_\_\_\_\_

Mailing Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City: \_\_\_\_\_

State: \_\_\_\_\_

Zip: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Present Employer: \_\_\_\_\_

Position: \_\_\_\_\_

Nominator's Name: \_\_\_\_\_

FICPA Chapter: \_\_\_\_\_

Present Employer: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Acknowledgement of nomination and occurrence of facts:

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

#### Nomination Procedures

This form is to be used in conjunction with a two-page synopsis of the nominee's background and community, charity, governmental, or civic activities, and reasons for nomination. Please include names of organizations, positions held, duration of service, and the responsibilities and accomplishments of each. If you have any questions, please contact the FICPA at (800) 342-3197. The deadline for nominations is Monday, July 1, 2000.

Please send nomination forms to: Business & Industry Award, Florida Institute of CPAs, P.O. Box 5437, Tallahassee, FL 32314

## His Passions Run Deep

(continued from page 33)

for important documentation when they needed it. Wells believed there must be an easier way for clients to gain access to their own information.

"We thought, hey, why not build an electronic safe deposit box as part of what we're doing," says Wells. "This product will have a great lock-in value."

Formed just one year ago, b4bpartner.com helped begin to satisfy these needs. Wells' company has changed the way financial institutions deliver documents to their customers; how customers prepare, sign, and submit financial agreements; and how customers securely share and track critical documents with third parties.

Today, the company has grown from three to 10 employees and busi-

ness continues to boom. Their list of clients includes banks and law firms. And just last month, Wells' Internet start-up inked a deal with DigitalWork.com, the leading Internet business service provider for entrepreneurs and small businesses. Wells' company will exclusively provide legal form preparation, on-line signature, electronic safe deposit boxes, faxing, and scanning to its distribution partners, which include major Internet players such as AOL, IBM, AT&T, Office Depot, and Wells Fargo through Wells' original destination site, [www.b4blaw.com](http://www.b4blaw.com).

As founder and CEO of his own internet-based company, Wells is responsible for the day-to-day operations of the firm as well as its ulti-

mate success. "It's pretty stressful, and it's a lot of work," he says. "I'm putting in about 90 hours per week in this new venture. I hate to lose or fail at anything, so I do everything I can to make sure that it succeeds."

With a 90-hour week, Wells doesn't have too much time for outside interests. Any free time he has is spent with Diane and their two girls, Katie, three, and Drew, 15 months. Wells attributes much of his success to Diane, who has been there every step of the way. "She has been more than supportive," says Wells. "She's been so understanding through this transition . . . she really is a godsend." ■

**FICPA SUMMER VACATION CLUSTER**

Choose from the following topics:

- Stress Management & S Corps
- A & A (Accounting & Audit) Employment & Labor Law
- Fed. Tax Updates & How to Beat the IRS Legally
- Real Estate & Fiduciary Accounting

For more information, contact the FICPA Member Service Center at 1-800-424-2424.

Advanced Registration: \$100 (includes materials) | \$100 Per Session