

Vertex buys Andersen unit

It hires 197 from the office in Sarasota County

June 12, 2002

SARASOTA COUNTY -- It was the first time in three months that Jim Shedivy had seen an Arthur Andersen employee smile.

Shedivy's Tax Technology Enterprise -- one of Andersen's four business units in Sarasota County -- has closed its deal with privately held Vertex Inc. of Pennsylvania.

"It was genuine relief," said Shedivy, Andersen's managing partner and head of the former TTE.

The local unit is part of the accounting powerhouse ravaged in the Enron scandal after employees shredded documents related to the energy broker. All of the employees making the shift from Andersen to Vertex received the same or better benefits packages, Shedivy said. Vertex has hired 197 workers, including a few from human resources and from Vantage Source, another local division.

TTE is now a wholly-owned subsidiary of Vertex called "Vertex Tax Technology Enterprises LLC."

Unknown is whether Shedivy, who has led TTE since 1989, will stay on with Vertex and in what capacity.

"I haven't made a decision," Shedivy said Tuesday. "I want to do something that's interesting, that's exciting and meaningful. We're discussing what the possibilities are."

The all-cash deal gives Vertex TTE's technology, intellectual property and miscellaneous furniture and computer equipment. Vertex develops corporate income tax software on the outskirts of Philadelphia.

None of the new Vertex employees must move. Shedivy and Jeffrey R. Westphal, Vertex's president and chief executive, have unofficially dubbed the two operations "Vertex North" and "Vertex South."

"It's kind of a funny feeling to be calling Andersen anything but Andersen, especially for us old guys," Shedivy said.

The sale gives closure to workers in at least one of the local divisions.

The former accounting conglomerate was indicted for destroying records related to Enron audits last year. Since then, Andersen clients have left in droves, forcing thousands of layoffs. Competitors have been snapping up company partners and employees.

Excluding the new Vertex workers, Andersen has about 230 employees left in Sarasota County, down from more than 700 in early March.

That number is expected to further dwindle.

The Processing Centers Organization is expected to lay off up to half its approximately 130 payroll and accounting workers in the next few months, according to Gregg Jones, the Andersen partner who heads the PCO.

Anna Stratakes, a former TTE business analyst now employed by Vertex, said the deal ends months of uncertainty. Her husband, Greg Stratakes, works for the same group. Her sister, Laura Wilson, lost her job with the Global Technology Organization, another Andersen division. Workers in Stratakes' department have consumed about 500 aspirins in the last few weeks.

"It's been a real rough couple of months," Stratakes said. "We need a change from coming to work and being Andersen."

Bob Lund, a senior application developer, agreed.

"We're very happy to have it over with," said Lund, who was among the 65 TTE workers laid off in May. He was called back to work a few days later.

But T.J. Turner, a 26-year-old business analyst, might exemplify the widest range of emotions endured by former TTE workers.

It was just a year ago that Turner won \$45,000 -- the cash equivalent of a new Jaguar -- in an Andersen contest for employee referrals. He married on July 21, spending the cash on the wedding and a down payment on a Lake Sarasota home.

"So much has changed in the year," Turner said. "I bought a house and (am) working for a new company. It's great that we get to stay in Sarasota. It's one of the most exciting things about it - just to be able to stay here and continue on with our lives."

heraldtribune.com

Serving the Herald-Tribune newspaper and SNN Channel 6
© Sarasota Herald-Tribune. All rights reserved.