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USER PROFILE: PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE

Third-generation owners from San Angelo, Texas, revel in their firm's 70-year history — and their outlook on what's to come.

PRODUCTS HIGHLIGHTED IN THIS ISSUE

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Past, Present AND FUTURE

Now in its third-generation, Harlow & Harlow LLP relies on 70-plus years of history and happily embraces what's yet to come

Have integrity. Be honest. Serve the client. Tell the truth. Those are the lessons David Harlow, CPA, learned from working side by side with his father, L.C. Harlow Jr., in the accounting firm that his grandfather founded in 1944.

"I sound a lot like a Boy Scout," Harlow says. "But these are traditional values. I was born in 1949, after the war. So we grew up during the time of *Father Knows Best* and *Leave It to Beaver*. You kind of grow up in the Cleaver household and you take that as the foundation."

A sense of traditional values extends outside the walls of Harlow & Harlow LLP and into the city of San Angelo, Texas. It's where Harlow and his brother, Grady — the other partner in the firm — were raised, having dinnertime conversations about the family business. It's where they went to college. And it's where their clients — who also have become their friends — know their name.

At their firm in San Angelo, Texas, David Harlow (left) and his brother, Grady, honor the early days with an "accounting museum" complete with an adding machine, yet they also appreciate the benefits of technological evolution.



Trevor Paulhus





USER PROFILE

After the brothers became CPAs, they were partners with their father until he retired in 2006 at age 86. "If you do the math, that is over 30 years," Harlow says. "To be able to work with your father for that length of time is something special. We admired him. We looked up to him. And he was well-respected, so it was easy to fall into that philosophy."

And the community loved him, too. "Some of our clients we've had for 50 years," Harlow says. "A couple of them were pallbearers at Dad's funeral."

DECADES OF CHANGE

Over the past 45 years, Harlow has not just built relationships. He's witnessed a complete technological evolution of the industry. As it's moved from heavy handwritten journals and ledgers to computers to online portals, he's adapted and appreciated the benefits that each change brings.

"When we first started, you had an adding machine that had a footprint on your desk of about two and a half feet, and it weighed a ton," he says. One of those behemoths sits in the firm's archives, an "accounting museum" of sorts, along with one of the first 1040 forms — it was one page.

Although he never wants to go back to the ledger system, Harlow does recognize the potential pitfalls of computerization.

"It took a great deal of effort to record an entry by hand, but that's how we



The team at Harlow & Harlow LLP, from left: Jacob Allgood, Nelly Muro, David Harlow, Grady Harlow, Gracie Fernandez and Tammy O'Neil.

learned," he says. "When we were doing tax returns manually, I think we had a better understanding of the movement of numbers inside of a return." Now that software allows a person to enter a number once and automatically flow it throughout the return, it can be harder to know where the number came from, he says.

"We have to be careful that we don't let our software prepare the return," he says.

"It's a tool that allows us to prepare the return better, more efficiently. But unless you can look at the return and explain it to somebody, then you're letting your software rule your business."

TOOLS OF THE TRADE

It's clear from the way Harlow talks about his business and his clients that he loves what he does. And he wants everyone who works



Talking More Than Tax Returns

On David Harlow's wall is his CPA license from the state of Texas. Some days he thinks there should be another certificate hanging there as well — that one says "Family Counselor."

"We are privy to more personal information than most professions," he says. "We cherish that. We hold that close. As the years progress, we've listened to clients talk about their kids, their grandkids, the good things that have happened to them, and the bad. Sometimes they just need to be able

to talk to somebody about something other than this tax return."

By listening to clients and giving them the opportunity to open up and ask for help, Harlow says, "frequently we're in a position to help them with one of these personal things they're wrestling with."

The lines of communication go both ways, too. "If something in my life happens," he says, "I'm going to pick up the phone or send an email to somebody who's not just my client. He's my friend."

with him to share that joy. That's one of the reasons he and his brother decided to invest in making the switch to UltraTax CS from another software program they'd been using for 15 years.

"When you like what you do, you don't want what you're doing it with to talk back to you," he says. "You want these tools that you're using to help you, not to fight you. The way these Thomson Reuters products have been designed, it's just like they got inside my head and said, 'This is exactly how this stuff needs to flow.'"

Harlow & Harlow's adoption of Thomson Reuters products happened over time as their needs evolved. With the firm's growth in the early 2000s, the partners needed to work more efficiently, so they turned to Creative Solutions Accounting (CSA). In 2002, they wanted to embrace the paperless office philosophy, and they found a solution in FileCabinet CS. When CSA was being phased out in 2013, Accounting CS led them to the integrated efficiencies of NetClient CS, Practice CS, Fixed Assets CS, Planner CS and, finally, UltraTax CS, which they implemented in summer 2014.

"Getting used to the new tool is the hardest part," Harlow says. And while they dreaded learning the new program and converting client data, their fears were unfounded. "Our IT people worked with the Thomson Reuters IT people, and the data converted beautifully. The learning curve on UltraTax CS is a snap. You have to make a commitment to learn it, but it has been worth it."

THE NEXT GENERATION

As times and technology evolved, so did the makeup of the firm. Over the past 70 years, the name has changed from L.C. Harlow and Son to L.C. Harlow Jr. and Sons to Harlow, Harlow & Harlow to its current incarnation of Harlow & Harlow. What's next?

That's hard to say. Though the Harlow bloodline probably will end with the two brothers, they don't want to see this third-generation business close its doors.

"There is not a fourth generation," Harlow says. "But there is a hope to continue the philosophy of what has been around since 1944. We are striving diligently to find that person or those

persons who see the value of what we have and want to make it their own."

Just like everything else he approaches, Harlow is finding happiness in the hunt for a successor. "It's very exciting to look at a new graduate from an accounting college and say, 'Do I see in their eyes something that I want?'"

No doubt, they'll find just the right fit to carry on their tradition of integrity, honesty and client service.

See how Thomson Reuters UltraTax CS can help you get past the everyday grind of tax returns to better serve your clients. Listen to a free recorded webcast — "The 365-Day Return" — at cs.tr.com/365-return-webcast.



"There is a hope to continue the philosophy of what has been around since 1944."

— David Harlow

David and Grady Harlow took over the accounting firm owned by their father (left) and grandfather (far right), founded on traditional values: integrity, honesty, service and truthfulness.

FIRM FACTS

BASICS: Harlow & Harlow LLC is a third-generation family firm that started in San Angelo, Texas, in 1944. The firm has two full-time CPAs and provides tax preparation, tax planning, monthly write-up, payroll and financial counseling services to approximately 1,000 clients.

WEBSITE: The firm's mission is "to help clients maintain financial viability in the present, while taking a proactive approach to achieve future goals." On its website, harlowcpa.com, you'll find a client portal as well as financial guides, tax tools and tips, and daily news updates.

SOFTWARE: Harlow & Harlow LLC has been using Thomson Reuters products since 1996. The firm now relies on Accounting CS, Practice CS, Fixed Assets CS, FileCabinet CS, Workpapers CS, Web Builder CS, UltraTax CS, NetClient CS, Checkpoint and Planner CS.