

# HOUSTON BUSINESS JOURNAL

Strictly Houston. Strictly Business.

Vol. 38 No. 35 Week of January 11 - 17, 2008

houston.bizjournals.com

## CPA's photography knack yields bonus for firm

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HOUSTON BUSINESS JOURNAL

Were it not for the busy accountants toiling away in their offices, visitors to the offices of Gainer, Donnelly & Desroches LLP might believe they were touring a gallery of work by a noted professional photographer.

Fact is, they are seeing the works of a Houston accountant and increasingly popular hobby photographer who is responsible for the breathtaking pictures displayed throughout the office. But even those who have never set foot inside may be familiar with both the photos and the firm. An annual calendar that has been sent to clients, associates and friends of the 60-year-old company for the past few years features dramatic photos taken during the travels of senior partner Sam Gainer and his wife, Norma.

What began five years ago as a substitute for holiday greeting cards has expanded, however, to an annual project drawing more requests each year from clients as well as marketing professionals and other firms nationwide who have asked to distribute the colorful marketing tool themselves.

"It's been really good for the firm," says Gainer, who, showing a knack for photography at a young age, was put in charge of the family camera on vacations.

This year, a debate ensued over whether to put a hole in the center of the top of the calendar for hanging, since many clients said they wanted pristine copies for framing. To help honor these requests, Gainer made high resolution, downloadable and wallpaper versions available online through the firm's Web site.

"It definitely differentiates us in the marketplace," he admits. "In fact, I've gotten referrals from people who

ask me about my pictures before they talk about accounting."

So popular are the firm's calendars that production of the 2008 version featuring castles and palaces from around the world was nearly doubled at more than 10,000. The first calendar, a collection of Gainer's work called "The World Through My Eyes," was sent to 3,000 clients. The recipients were duly impressed, and it wasn't long before requests began rolling in.

"We get calls from clients if they don't receive their calendars," says marketing manager Stacy Soefer. "A holiday card eventually will get thrown away, but these have a shelf life of at least a year — and many of our clients still have all of them."

Gainer, whose career also includes several ragtime music albums as an Austin pianist plus a stint as juggler and magician, is described by peers as a "larger-than-life" personality who has found a profitable way for his company to take advantage of a lifelong passion. His early decision to go from entertainer to a more serious profession was not so much of a leap, he says, since he enjoys working with clients and other professionals who have their own unique tastes and interests.

"We encourage our people to be creative with their endeavors and try to make a place for them," Gainer says. "I like to use my



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Sam Gainer, CPA, of Gainer, Donnelly & Desroches, uses photos from his travels to dress up both the firm's office and annual calendar: 'We encourage our people to be creative with their endeavors and try to make a place for them.'

photography as an example of that."

His hobby, he says, has turned out to be an "interesting" way to promote the firm through not only the calendar project but cover photos used by publications of the Society of Petroleum Geologists and CPA members' handbook.

Meanwhile, the Houston Museum of Natural Science has approached him about a photo exhibit on "Natural Wonders of the World," which was the focus of his 2006 calendar.

The topic for the firm's 2009 calendar, "Man-made Wonders of the World," has already been established with several photos already selected while others are yet to be taken.

"Photography is my absolute passion," Gainer says. "I try to keep up a certain standard. With each picture (featured in the calendars), I don't want to disappoint with a single one."

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SAM GAINER PHOTOS COURTESY OF GAINER, DONNELLY & DESROCHES

Castles and palaces from around the world are featured in the firm's 2008 calendar, which was mailed to clients last month. More than 10,000 copies of the calendar were printed this year, double last year's amount.