



## Sikich Not Just a Numbers Game

By Matt L. Ottinger

With eight branches across the country, Sikich utilizes its conference room to keep employees connected via webinars and training.



Sikich’s Indianapolis office sits above an Italian restaurant on the city’s northeast side, and diversity and growth have been the main ingredients in this CPA firm’s signature dish. The company boasts a great deal more than just accounting—also offering help with information technology (IT), human resources consulting and managed services for its clients.

Headquartered in Illinois, the company now features eight branches, with the Indianapolis office opening in 2005. Partner-in-charge Steve Imler came aboard two years ago and is grateful for the wide breadth of knowledge at the firm.

“The thing I like about Sikich is that it’s provided me with a lot more resources than we had (prior to the 2011 merger),” he relays. “That goes with the fact that we have about 70 partners and about 450 people (nationally). We have a lot of industry verticals – clients in construction, manufacturing and distribution. While our office might have a number of areas covered, it multiplies significantly when you multiply that by eight offices. It gives us a chance to fire a question out to the group.”

### Developing a winner

Development is a critical part of Sikich’s culture. The firm offers an array of useful tools to help its staffers enhance their skills.

“It’s nice to have access to all of those resources; SikichConnect is our internal web site where you can get about any information you need, and we also have Sikich University,” notes staff accountant Carrie Poling. “That’s a newer program, but it’s off to a good start. It’s a structured program that allows you to get credits that you need and helps with professional development.”

Sikich University allows employees to pursue additional training and certifications to help further their careers. Such amenities are just one reason why tax manager Josh Sickler has been with the company for nine years.

“I think we’ve always been given good resources, both with training to make ourselves better and as far as making sure the technology allows us to get our jobs done efficiently,” he says.

He adds that the accessibility of the company’s partners also breeds an environment of learning for those eager to listen.

“I’ve always liked working with the partners,” Sickler points out. “Since he’s arrived, (Imler) has had an open door policy, and I’ve learned a lot from him. He and the partners are good about transferring that knowledge. That’s one thing that’s kept me here and it’s really helped my career.”

Though the firm is spread across the country in eight locations, there’s a core unity shared across the company, according to Poling.

“There is a common leadership vision conveyed throughout,” she denotes. “Even though we’re not part of headquarters (in Naperville, Illinois), we’re constantly updated through emails, webinars, end-of-the-year recaps and a retreat ... our office did our own retreat physically, but we were also incorporated through the other offices via webinar. Even (CEO) Jim Sikich himself is often sending out encouragement as well.”

### Teammates

Imler adds that Sikich truly boasts a team atmosphere. With around 30 employees in Indiana (with some IT personnel working mostly out of the office), Sikich takes a collaborative approach to client satisfaction.

“We work in teams,” he reports. “We’re not like the big four accounting firms where you’re definitely a tax person or an audit person or a consultant. We all have a variety of those attributes to bring to the table for our clients, so it’s a team approach with the idea of seeing things the client can use that they may not have had in the past.”

Poling adds that the team approach allows clients to receive the best service.

“We take a lot of pride in the work we do for our clients,” she declares. “There are at least two or three people looking at every project that goes out the door to make sure we’ve examined and considered everything and gathered recommendations to give to the client. There’s a lot of quality control and it’s very client focused.”

She adds that the ability to work on multiple assignments helps Sikich staffers think differently and enjoy their work.

“I’m fairly new to the tax industry but have worked on related projects,” she shares. “You don’t feel like a cog in a machine here. The day doesn’t seem as long, as I may be pulled into a meeting with a partner to discuss a new start-up client, and I have the ability to interact with clients through emails or phone calls, and there’s a large variety of projects I take on. I’m not focused on a single industry, and there are multiple types of returns.”



Employees credit Sikich’s partners for creating a culture that helps staff develop and enhance their careers.

### Fruits of the labor

Sikich offers generous benefits to its employees, including a match on retirement savings, paid “thank you” days that are not deducted against paid time off, contributions toward health savings accounts, flex time in the non-busy season and fitness reimbursements.

Imler explains the company has averaged about 12-15% growth over the past five to 10 years, and has participated in nearly 30 mergers in the last several.



Sikich displays its honor as one of the Best Places to Work in Indiana.

“It’s a pretty progressive firm, with the idea being that we want talented people in all these areas,” he explains.

When asked about maintaining camaraderie when staff is added, he surmises that those coming onboard benefit when they join Sikich.

“When there’s a merger, we need to bring standards up to Sikich standards for people,” he offers. “So that increases their paid time off, probably enhances their medical coverage – so no one gets hurt with mergers at the staff level. Everyone’s coming out as good or better.”

Staff is also treated to evenings out together. Several times each year, the Indianapolis office enjoys sporting events like Indianapolis Indians or Indiana Ice games, or bowling and golf outings as a way to show gratitude to employees.

According to Sickler, that approach means a great deal.

“I always appreciated being appreciated,” he conveys. “In our office, we’re close enough that people recognize what you’re doing and what you’re working on; they always take time to thank you for that.”