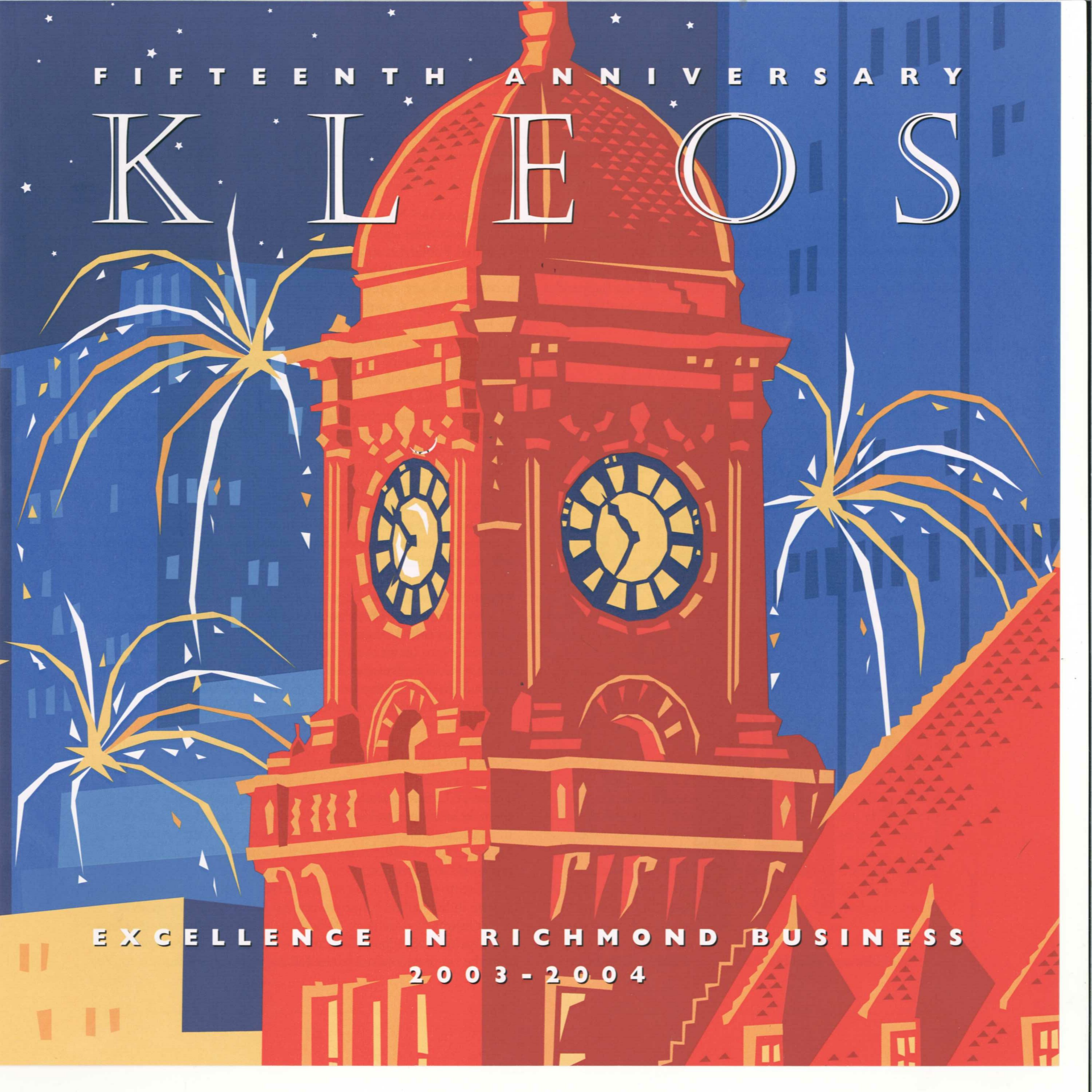


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EXCELLENCE IN RICHMOND BUSINESS

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A NEW BALLGAME

The young firm of Piascik & Associates PC successfully serves a market of high-net-worth individuals, including many professional athletes.

by Linda Barrett

Any baseball player knows that his first at-bat is a nerve-racking experience. He steps up to the plate and taps the dust off his shoes. Then, eyeing the ball and calling upon every bit of training and experience he has had, he takes a swing. Whack! The crowd roars as the first hit sails out of the ballpark!

Impossible? No—it happens. And it happened to Steve Piascik two years ago when he founded Piascik & Associates PC, Certified Public Accountants. At age 35, he is one of the youngest and newest players among Richmond's major league accounting firms, appearing in the November 2003 issue of *Virginia Business* as one of the best CPAs in Virginia, as selected by his peers.

Piascik honed his skills under the tutelage of Big Four accounting firm KPMG LLP, where he quickly rose through the ranks. His last promotion, however, included an offer to relocate to the Norfolk, Virginia, region. Not wanting to move, he opted to become a free agent instead, and with KPMG's blessing, struck out on his own. "I started the company on September 15, 2001, right after 9/11," he remembers. It was a scary time for anyone to start a new business, but even during such a dark time, things started to go right for Steve Piascik.

While many companies choose to tackle one niche market for success, this firm chose three: Financial Planning and Tax Strategy, International Tax, and Professional Athletes. The firm's offerings immediately scored a triple play.

Financial Planning and Tax Strategy

As a trusted adviser, Piascik & Associates provides financial planning services to create, maintain and constantly update financial plans on an individual basis for high-net-worth individuals. The firm gathers specifics from each client to solidify personal goals and create targeted plans, which are routinely reviewed and updated quarterly. To remain independent and unbiased financial advisers, Piascik & Associates makes recommendations but does not directly represent investment firms or health or life insurance companies. Clients and advisers become players on the same team. "It is our goal to remain proactive," Piascik explains. "I'll call clients and simply invite them to lunch just to keep up with what is happening in their lives. If they have gotten married, are having a baby or someone has lost a job, it will change their investment plan and they may not think of calling us."

Creative and clear tax strategies that consistently work to reduce individual or corporate tax expense are primary goals of the company's tax division. Whether the client is buying or selling a company, merging or divesting, Piascik & Associates ensures that the tax is minimized to the fullest degree possible.

President and Founder Steven M. Piascik, CPA, MT

International Tax

Piascik & Associates enters the World Series with its International Tax practice, servicing clients throughout Europe and Asia. With an in-depth understanding of global tax implications, the firm provides services for an extensive list of international companies having U.S. operations.

A number of international tax filing requirements not previously recognized were identified for several of Piascik's international clients, resulting in thousands of dollars in tax savings and avoiding penalties. Specialty areas include, but are not limited to, international customs, VAT (value-added tax) and duties planning and compliance, transfer pricing studies and extraterritorial income exclusion identification and quantification.

Professional Athletes

Piascik's All-Star Game shines in this department, where over 50 professional athletes in the NFL, the NBA, and MLB rely on the firm's expertise for their complicated tax issues. Recognizing the specialized needs of this high-income market and the opportunities existing there, the firm embarked on this market niche by passing rigorous certification requirements to become listed as a resource with these major league associations. Many of Piascik's clients are household names, as visitors can see in the growing collection of autographed sports memorabilia at the firm's Innsbrook headquarters.

Over the summer Steve was told by a client how his 8-year-old son loved baseball—especially a certain player. Unbeknownst to the client, that player was also a client of the firm. All it took was a quick phone call for Steve to be able to present a signed baseball to the delighted youth three days later. "I like having the kind of clients that would do that for a child, and I try to build that kind of relationship with all my clients," Piascik says.

"It has been surprising to me how fast we've grown," Piascik admits. "At first I thought my age would be the biggest barrier for the company. But really, it has been an advantage." Piascik finds that clients are looking for young, aggressive partners as their CPA representative. They tell him, "We want you around for a long time, Steve."

"We are go-getters, and we put in a lot of hours," he continues. "Clients can call anytime and they know I'm here several nights a week to support their accounts." Clients also receive routine tax consulting services throughout their

engagement and can call anytime to discuss their everyday tax issues without extra billing. "We are not going to nickel-and-dime our clients," Piascik affirms. "We want to be their partner, and that means opening that channel of communication. We need to out-service our clients' expectations." Also, initial consultations are available at no charge.

"I want to give back to a community that has been so good to our firm and my family."

Putting the right players in the right positions is a foundation of the firm's business model. Almost all of the 14 employees come from Big Four firms, and many have advanced degrees in specialized areas. "We will do everything it takes to get the job done, to ensure that the client is happy, not just satisfied," emphasizes Piascik. The firm's clients have the option to attend regular client appreciation events and workshops throughout the year.

The firm promotes community service as well. Employees are compensated for time spent in charitable endeavors, and Piascik himself serves on the boards of Big Brothers/Big Sisters, the Greater Richmond Technology Council, the Virginia Technology Alliance, the German School and several other organizations. This year the firm is a Platinum Sponsor of the Medical Society of Virginia's annual meeting and also sponsors a stock car at the Southside Speedway that sports its logo. "I want to give back to a community that has been so good to our firm and my family," Piascik notes.

Piascik has had no less than four buyout and six partnership offers thus far, all of which he has politely refused. He has come a long way since hitting that first pitch out of the ballpark, and he plans to be in this game for a long time to come.

Piascik & Associates certainly has its bases covered, and early indicators predict this firm will be one for the record books.