



Ralph A. Thomas, CPA

Ralph Albert Thomas: A Leader Among CPAs

Ralph Albert Thomas, CPA, a NABA past president, is a leader among CPAs as executive director of the New Jersey Society of Certified Public Accountants (NJSCPA), a position he has held since 1999. The NJSCPA is a nonprofit, professional business organization composed of more than 15,000 CPAs. Founded in 1898, NJSCPA is one of the largest and oldest state CPA societies in the nation. Thomas is currently the only African American at the helm of a state CPA society.

Prior to assuming this post, Thomas was a vice president with Citibank, N.A.'s Structured Products Group in New York City. He joined Citigroup in February 1987 after spending more than four years with AT&T Information Systems as a manager in various accounting and financial areas. Prior to AT&T, Thomas worked in Systems Development at Potomac Electric Power Company in Washington, DC, and with the Washington, DC office of Price Waterhouse & Co.

Thomas said he understands the difficulty in passing the CPA exam and noted that it took him a while to pass it because at the time he was working very hard in his career. He said, however, that it is essential for those who aspire to the highest levels of the profession to do so. "It's sort of the icing on the cake. Having the CPA credential distinguishes you from the average Joe, because it is highly regarded in the business world today. It's a finishing touch to majoring in accounting, and it is an entrée for senior level positions. If you look in the job ads today for CFO or corporate controller, they generally want someone with a CPA,"

said Thomas. "If I had not passed the CPA exam, I question if I would be where I am today. It opens doors for you."

Thomas is active in NABA as a member of the President's Advisory Committee and the Ethics Committee. In addition, he participated in NABA's CPA Summit, held at the past two Annual National Conventions.

Passionate about fulfilling the NABA motto, "Lifting As We Climb," Thomas makes it his business to speak frequently to college and high school students about the accounting and finance professions. In addition, he says that the NJSCPA has one of the largest scholarship funds of any of the state societies.

Thomas says that because of the abundance of opportunities in the accounting and finance professions, it is "important for students of color, majoring in accounting to go to the next level and get the CPA designation. He said that he understands that some of the barriers to doing so include economics, and that some feel the need to immediately go out into the workforce. He said, however, that today's exam format enables candidates to take one part of the exam at a time, so that they don't need to study for all four parts at once.

Thomas is an active member of the American Institute of Certified Public Accountants (AICPA) and serves on the AICPA Strategic Planning Committee. He has also served on the AICPA's Group of 100, the Business and Industry Executive Committee, the CPA Vision Project Team, the Peer Review Board and AICPA Council. **np**