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It's your business

For CPA firm, global focus is a big plus

**Business • Company President
Manuel Ramirez looks to the future.**

Fast track Manuel J.

Ramirez

Title: President
Company: Ramirez International, 19762 MacArthur, Suite 100, Irvine

Age: 35
Career: Started at McGladrey Pullen in 1988, joined Price Waterhouse a year later. In 1990, joined Miranda Strabala & Associates. In 1992, Ramirez and Paul Strabala created Strabala Ramirez & Associates. In April, Ramirez launched Ramirez International.

Education: Bachelor's degree in accounting from California State University, Fullerton. Master's in tax law from Golden Gate University in 1998.

Family: Wife, Adriana, (USC Alumni); children Samantha and Michael Christopher.

Activities: President, Orange County Hispanic Chamber of Commerce - he has pledged to double membership within two years. Attends Beatitude of Our Lord church in La Mirada. Volunteers with the Make a Wish Foundation. Member of the Lincoln Club, a prestigious Republican fund-raising group, and Legatus, a group of Catholic CEOs.

By ELIZABETH AQUILERA
The Orange County Register

Yellow and red scribbles and arithmetic formulas scatter across the white marker board that stretches from one side of the conference room to the other. It's not the work of a mad genius, but of the mind-crunching imagination of Manuel Ramirez, president of Ramirez International, an Irvine-based CPA firm.

He is using the board to map out how a U.S. firm with business in Asia and Canada can side-step the harsh taxes and high fees there.

Ramirez International, formerly known as Strabala Ramirez & Associates, was renamed recently as a way to emphasize the firm's focus on consulting and international trade work.

Paul Strabala also separated from the firm, which has been recognized as one of the Top 25 accounting firms in Orange County. It also has an office in Los Angeles. Ramirez, 35, also serves as president of the Hispanic Chamber of Commerce.

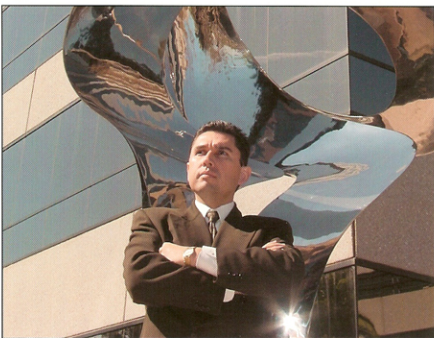
By exploring funding for international ventures and working on international trade agreements, Ramirez is staying ahead of the curve, according to the American International Association of Certified Public Accountants.

His plan to expand globally fits the AICPA's Vision Program, said spokesman Geoffrey Pickard.

The program encourages members to create five-to-10-year plans that include regulatory, global and technological changes, Pickard said.

"The trend has been for CPAs to become more vigilant of what their client's needs are and what they can offer in terms of new services," Pickard said.

Those trend-setting firms "have focused on the need to



MANUEL RAMIREZ, president and CEO of Ramirez International, recently changed the name and focus of his firm in an effort to expand its vision.

"Unlike mere bean counters that have absolutely no imagination, Manuel has an entrepreneurial sense, an understanding, a flavor of deals and business."

CARMINE BUA
San Diego Attorney

look ahead and anticipate some of the requirements they may need to meet, given the pace of change not only in this country but in other parts of the world."

In Ramirez's case, about 32 percent of the firm's business now is international, coming from as far away as the Philippines and Africa, Ramirez said.

The 22-person firm, which negotiates contracts, creates staffing models and takes care of all property, estate and income-tax issues, tallied more than \$1 million in revenue last year.

Ramirez and his staff help companies prepare for public offerings, and they clean up the finances of existing entities.

San Diego attorney Carmine Bua first used the firm more than eight years ago to assist a company that was getting ready to go public.

"I was impressed that they took a complex mess and organized it," Bua said. "I didn't think they could do it."

The firm's move to an inter-

national focus is no surprise to Bua, who views Ramirez International as much more than a numbers-crunching creature.

"Unlike mere bean counters that have absolutely no imagination, Manuel has an entrepreneurial sense, an understanding, a flavor of deals and business," Bua said.

Ramirez, soft-spoken but intense, had his heart set on an accounting career from the time he was a sixth-grader at Immaculate Heart of Mary elementary school in Santa Ana.

A year later, his parents faced an IRS audit and were saved by a certified public accountant, cinching the career choice for young Ramirez, who originally wanted to be a priest.

"There was no choice for me at that point," he said. "I wanted to help people like my parents."

He studied accounting at Mater Dei High School while working at a local CPA office and crunching numbers for his father's construction company. Ramirez worked at several CPA firms before joining

Strabala - then called Miranda Strabala & Associate. Two years after joining, Ramirez became one of the youngest partners in the firm's history.

Ramirez recently returned from Chiapas, Mexico, where he and several Orange County investors scouted out a coffee deal that could result in thousands of dollars for the farmers who produce the product. Ramirez, with his new emphasis on international ventures, was responsible for securing funding for the project.

"We stay focused on the bottom line," Ramirez said.

"We want to maximize the amount of money in the owner's pocket, either by helping them with projects or taxes."

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