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From the Nov. 2007 Issue

Ryan McCowan pretty much always knew he would be an accountant. From his memories as a little boy helping out in the hardware store his grandpa had started in 1935, and continuing to work there through high school, it was always Ryan's job to help manage the books. So with an apparently incurable case of write-up-itis in his blood, when Ryan finally headed to college at the University of Kentucky, an Accounting major was a foregone conclusion. After graduating in 1993, he chose to return to his hometown of London, Kentucky, about 75 miles south of Lexington.

After working for an established CPA practice for a few years, Ryan partnered with another local CPA, Steve Greene, to found Greene & McCowan, CPAs (www.gmccpa.com).

The practice, now in its ninth year, has a total staff of five that includes two payroll clerks and an accounting clerk, in addition to the principals. Although small in number, the firm has a fairly large client base, specializing in providing accounting, planning and tax services to S-Corps, contractors, banks and individuals. The firm's most notable strength, however, is in its payroll services, which include about 60 payroll runs that result in more than 150,000 paychecks and pay deposits per year. In all, Greene & McCowan, CPAs services more than 400 individual clients and nearly 200 business entities, nonprofits and trusts.

"Advances in technology have made it possible for us to provide a lot more services to our clients, far more than what a small firm could have done even 10 years ago," according to Ryan, who received his CITP credential from the AICPA, noting his professional technological capabilities. With Ryan

leading the practice's technological charge, the firm has been near the

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system that shares data with the professional system, allowing staff at the firm to always be in control and better service clients. Even though the practice is located in a generally rural area, it received an outstanding score of 430 on the Productivity Survey, a free online tool that helps public accounting firms identify strengths and weaknesses in their technology usage. Any practice can take it at www.cpatechadvisor.com/productivity.

This remote access capability has enabled the practice to serve clients in four states, and to develop a core client base of several franchisees of the world's largest burger joint. In all, these franchises have more than 65 locations, but technology has allowed Ryan's practice to provide accounting and tax services to them.

With such success on the technology front, it would be easy to imagine Ryan as a working stiff focused only on his practice. And technology is a personal hobby of his, too, from his pocket-sized OQO 02 mobile computer, to programs that help people be more productive. "I just really love anything that's technology-related and like to talk with other people and other professionals about how these things can help them."

But labeling Ryan as a working stiff only focused on his practice is about as far from the truth as you can get. This past tax season, everyone in the office was out the door by 5:00, including the firm's partners Ryan and Steve. "It was really the smoothest tax season yet, but that's the result of how we've used technology to make us more productive," he said. "When I was with a larger CPA firm, we could be in the office until 8:00 or 9:00 during tax season, and that just doesn't allow you to spend enough time with your family."

Sometimes things can get a little backed up, but remote access lets him work

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do. And since both of them grew up in London, there are usually plenty of other family members around, too. Whether working outside, swimming in the pool with his twin daughters Whitney and Ashley, or going to nearby Laurel Lake with family and friends, the McCowans love to spend time together, sometimes with a little healthy competition. This proud father even thinks he sees competitive swimmers in his daughters. They also take occasional road trips to Orlando and other fun places, and will be heading to Hawaii in November, where Ryan will be speaking at a conference. The subject: Paperless payroll and how to manage a tech savvy firm.

While football isn't as big for Kentucky alums as basketball is, Ryan has been cheering on UK's football team, which is in the midst of its most successful season in years. He also tries to attend basketball games at Rupp Arena in Lexington. Ryan is also active at the Corinth Baptist Church in London and is one of the coordinators of the local AWANA program, which provides Bible-based training for children, youth and teens. He is also treasurer of the local Gideon's camp and participates in placing bibles in area hotels.

To Ryan, his accounting practice is certainly an important part of his life, but it is not the central focus. That would be his family and faith. And his interest in technology and other productivity-enhancing tactics at work, while he enjoys them as a hobby, also helps him in another way. "For me, technology has meant being able to do the other things I love, especially spending time with my family."

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