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aimed at honoring CPA members who have impacted the profession through their expertise or volunteerism in their careers and/or community...

Jul. 14, 2020

As part of the New York State Society of CPAs ([NYSSCPA](#)) annual awards program, aimed at honoring CPA members who have impacted the profession through their expertise or volunteerism in their careers and/or community, four members have been announced for the 2020 awards.

Arthur J. Dixon Public Service Award

Lorraine P. Wolch has spent decades of her life applying her expertise as a CPA to philanthropic organizations throughout the Rochester area. As a veteran volunteer with the Jewish Federation of Greater Rochester (JFGR) and the housing organization Temprow, she has worked hard to ensure the financial stability of both organizations, which provide a wide variety of services for needy people in the area.

Wolch first joined the JFGR—which covers a variety of philanthropic activities in the wider community, ranging from youth programs to charitable giving to anti-hate advocacy—in 1986 as a program volunteer, before eventually joining the organization's professional advisory committee. As a current member of the JFGR's finance committee, Wolch turns her considerable skills as a CPA toward helping that organization. She is an important part of the annual budget process, and also has reviewed its Forms 990 before filing. But her involvement does not begin and end with the financial side.

For example, shortly before 9/11, Wolch worked through her organization as part of a national mission to Israel to understand issues on the ground. After the attacks, the group was temporarily stranded in Israel, and she was impressed with the Jewish

Federation's response, "making sure there were doctors available" for people who

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with a Housing and Urban Development grant, as well as through recent facility upgrades to its current housing stock, thanks to a New York State Homeless Housing and Assistance Program grant. Last year, Temprow celebrated its 50th anniversary, inviting back many of the original founders.

Amid all of this volunteer work, Wolch is also the head of her own firm, which she grew from a small home practice to a five-person firm offering a diverse array of accounting, tax and advisory services. She credited her husband and business partner, **Donald J. Onimus** (who nominated her for the award), as well as their staff, with giving her the support she needs to continue her volunteer work—and even helping with Temprow and other volunteer projects. For his own part, Onimus praised her as a "tireless volunteer" who has, over the course of her volunteer work, "shepherded [their] finances through multiple iterations of projects" in order to maintain their financial health.

Distinguished Service Award

Sidney Kess, the 2020 winner of the Society's Distinguished Service Award, is a legend. This is no exaggeration or hyperbole but, rather, a simple fact: One can be confident in saying that the number of CPAs who know his name and his work far outnumber those who do not. This is because he has spent more than half a century making his mark on the profession through education and instruction. Kess is the author of literally dozens of books and even more articles. He has personally taught over a million practitioners in CPE sessions, and has likely reached even more than that through the myriad audio courses, video presentations and conferences that he's created. Through it all, even at 94 years old, he also maintains positions as both senior consultant for Citrin Cooperman, one of the nation's largest accounting firms, and as of counsel for Kostelanetz & Fink, LLP, a leading tax law controversy firm.

(Kess is both a CPA and an attorney). And before any of this, as a young man, he

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Briarcliff College. Every year, he'd hold forth on his specialty, tax research.

By 1964, Kess had taken the content of these talks and developed them into a formal professional education course for the AICPA—the first of many he would come to create over the decades. He was initially asked to develop a course on individual income tax return preparation for the NYSSCPA. So many people attended, that the AICPA recruited Kess to teach it nationwide. He agreed, but insisted on waiving his fee for NYSSCPA members, in recognition of the fact that the Society had given him his first opportunity to get involved with continuing education. In 2010, the AICPA established the Sidney Kess Award for Excellence in Continuing Education in his honor. In 2012, he received the AICPA's Gold Medal and, in 2016, he received the AICPA's Personal Financial Planning Distinguished Service Award. But Kess' first loyalty remains with the NYSSCPA, and his appreciation has continued even decades after he joined.

Since that first course, countless professionals have benefited from his knowledge and expertise over the years, and Kess, in turn, has benefited from their gratitude and appreciation, as today he counts many of his former students among his most treasured friends.

Dr. Emanuel Saxe Outstanding CPA in Education Award

Jack Angel, an Adelphi University accounting professor, did not originally plan to be an educator. Having just left a position as a hearing officer at the IRS—his first job out of college—Angel started building his own practice on Long Island. While he grew his business, he also began teaching at Adelphi University, as he had received his master's degree through an IRS training program before leaving the service. While his practice did eventually grow over the years into a thriving business, Angel eventually realized that he loved teaching.

He loved the feeling he got when he'd speak in front of a room; he loved helping

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Angel, instead, sees them as complementary, saying that his practice helps him to maintain a certain practical mindset when presenting his lessons.

Understanding the struggles that some of his students had gone through already, many of whom had come from diverse backgrounds, Angel also made it a point to provide an empathetic ear on not just tax issues but also on whatever other challenges his students faced. This caring attitude is also what led him to launch a new site for the NYSSCPA's Career Opportunities in the Accounting Profession (COAP) program at Adelphi University almost 10 years ago, to sustain the program that had been situated at Hofstra University. He knew that it was important for the program to continue on somewhere else. After a successful launch, Angel became instrumental in maintaining the program as an active member of the COAP Advisory Board for his university. Angel is set to retire soon, after his nearly 40 years of teaching. He has also pulled back from his firm a little, with **Lynne M. Fuentes** taking care of most day-to-day operations, though he still meets with clients in order to maintain good relations.

Outstanding CPA in Industry Award

Janet T. Verneuille said that she has banking in her blood, her mother having worked her way up the industry's ranks after starting as a rack clerk at Citibank years ago. Following in her footsteps, Verneuille has spent most of her professional life in the same industry, bringing a CPA's sensibility to the world of community banks. Like many CPAs, Verneuille came into industry from public accounting, having taken a job at KPMG after graduating from Hofstra University, though even that career path can be attributed to her banking experience.

After a brief stint studying horticulture, she began taking accounting courses while employed as a teller at European American Bank, which paid for her bachelor's degree as she worked her way upward, eventually getting to the branch's back office

for asset-based lending and later becoming a small business lender. She continued

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Long Island area, including as a CFO and, today, as the chief risk officer at First National Bank of Long Island. Over the years, she has gained an appreciation for the unique accounting challenges that financial institutions present. Practically the entire balance sheet, she said, is financial in nature, which can make proper valuation and accuracy “far from simple.”

But Verneuille is not content to be just a CPA in banking. She has spent the past eight years as an active Suffolk Chapter member, educating her fellow CPAs through regular morning CPE sessions. Working through the chapter's Members in Industry Committee, which she co-chairs, Verneuille has brought literally dozens of speakers to the chapter to hold forth on a wide variety of topics, ranging from human resources issues to cybersecurity risk to blockchain to GAAP. She noted that, as a CPA in industry, she is under a lot of pressure to remain current, since she and others like her can't get their CPE through in-house training, as many in public accounting can. Beyond allowing for compliance with state requirements, CPE sessions enable members in industry to remain current with the accounting landscape so that they can better adapt to upcoming changes.

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