

# Berman Hopkins Wright & LaHam a cornerstone of business community for 50 years — to host client-appreciation events this fall as it marks half century; makes 'Top 100 for Working Families'

By Ken Datzman

VIERA — Berman Hopkins Wright & LaHam is celebrating its 50th anniversary in 2008 in Brevard County and the independent certified public accountant firm is turning the spotlight on its clients.

As it marks this entrepreneurial milestone, Berman Hopkins is reaching out to the businesses and individuals who have maintained relationships with the firm and have played an important role in the company's long-running success and growth in the market.

"Reaching the half-century mark is a huge milestone for any business, and being in the public-accounting arena I think it's an even bigger accomplishment," said Phil Hayes, one of the firm's seven partners. "We wouldn't be here for 50 years without having great clients. Our success is a result of our clients' success. So, this celebration of 50 years in the marketplace really is about our clients."

He said Berman Hopkins has built a roster of longtime clients, the cornerstone of a successful business. "I haven't researched it, but I bet we have a couple of clients who have been aboard for 50 years. I do know we have clients who have been with us for 30 years and longer. To maintain those kinds of relationships, you really have to be attuned to their needs and be there for very stage and turn of their business."

Berman Hopkins will host a 50th anniversary client-appreciation event on Oct. 16 at the Duran Golf Club in Viera. Tee time is 1 p.m. A social will follow at 5:30 p.m. "We hope to bring all of our clients together at this gathering and thank them," Hayes said.

The company will follow up with another such event on Nov. 16. This one will be at Berman Hopkins' new, company-owned corporate headquarters at Spyglass Plaza on Spyglass Hill Road. The evening cookout will be held outdoors on the facility grounds, under a tent. Former "alumni" of Berman Hopkins will be invited to the function.

"We will be welcoming Berman Hopkins alumni — people who worked for the firm and then perhaps went into private accounting or another area," Hayes said. "A lot of times these accounting professionals become our clients because we do work for the company they represent. Many of them remain in Brevard and are very good accountants. This will be an opportunity for us to visit with former Berman Hopkins team members and show our appreciation."

Lewis Berman founded the firm in 1958. In

the early 1980s, CPA John Hopkins merged his practice with Berman's, creating a larger company and building the foundation for future growth. Berman retired years ago. Today, the partners are Hopkins, James LaHam, James Wright Jr., Ross Whitley, Ed Moss Jr., Brian Nemeroff and Hayes.

Berman Hopkins expanded into the Orlando market in the early 2000s with the acquisition of Winter Park-based Moss and Reeves, P.A., a 13-year-old firm headed by CPA Ed Moss, a University of Florida graduate. With offices in Melbourne and Central Florida, the Berman Hopkins team currently comprises 85 people.

Hayes said that the company "is definitely poised to grow. We have the infrastructure in place to catapult us to the next level."

He adds, "And Berman Hopkins' long-range future is very clear. We've spent three years putting together a very solid succession plan for the practice."

Hayes spent 10 years in the banking industry before transitioning into the accounting world. "It was a big change for me." He's been with Berman Hopkins for eight years. Hayes became a partner of the practice in January 2006.

A graduate of the University of California at Davis, Hayes is the first, and only, non-CPA to hold partner status at Berman Hopkins.

He has a bachelor's degree in managerial economics from UC and a master of business administration from Webster University. He earned both degrees with high academic distinction, magna cum laude. "The firm has really given me the opportunity to grow," said Hayes, who completed a program offered by the National Association of Certified Valuation Analysts and holds the Accredited Valuation Analyst designation.

Berman Hopkins was recently named to the 15th annual Orlando Sentinel "Top 100 Companies for Working Families." The program is sponsored by Workforce Central Florida.

"It's an honor to be part of a group of companies in Central Florida that are considered the best places to work," Hayes said. "We continually strive to create a family-friendly environment at Berman Hopkins where people want to come to work and enjoy what they are doing."

He said Berman Hopkins "has incorporated a lot of family time and family events, including picnics and movie nights."

The Top 100 application consisted of a series of questions to determine what benefits are provided in categories of core benefits,



BBN photo — Adrienne B. Roth

Phil Hayes is one of seven partners of Berman Hopkins Wright & LaHam, CPAs and Associates, headquartered in Melbourne with an office in greater Orlando. The 85-person firm, 50 years old in 2008, is celebrating its success with its clients. The firm has planned events in October and November to recognize and thank their customers.

family-related benefits, work environment, communication, and training.

Berman Hopkins offers full benefits including health and dental insurance, and a 401(k) investment plan, in addition to a host of family activities.

In 2005, the firm established the Berman Hopkins Leadership Academy in conjunction with Florida Institute of Technology in Melbourne. The two-day program is a leadership conference for the practice's experienced staffers and managers. "The Leadership Academy is a big deal for the company," said Hayes, who worked closely with LaHam in putting together the academy program.

The speakers have included Phillip Farmer, former CEO of Harris Corp., and area entrepreneurs Travis Proctor of Artemis International and Tim Dwight of Green Turtle Market. Florida Tech faculty members from the College of Business, College of Engineering, and the College of Psychology and Liberal Arts also make presentations at the academy.

The workshops typically center on "soft skills," such as project management, conflict resolution and negotiating, and are tailored to the firm's needs.