

# San Fernando Valley Business Journal

[PRINT](#) | [CLOSE WINDOW](#)

## West L.A. CPA Firm Opening Valley Office

By Shelly Garcia - 12/4/2006

San Fernando Valley Business Journal Staff

Singer Lewak Greenbaum & Goldstein LLP is set to open a Warner Center office in hopes of capturing a larger slice of the growing financial services market and to help keep workers in what has become a fiercely competitive employment market.

The office, the first in the San Fernando Valley for the West L.A.-based CPA firm, will significantly shorten the commute many of its workers have had to endure, a promising retention tool in today's financial services market where headhunters have pulled out all the stops to meet a relentless demand for staffers.

The office, which officially opens on Dec. 7, will house 15 employees, mostly CPAs, and two partners. SLGG expects that number to grow to 25 in short order.

"The office was initially set up to retain employees and attract new ones," said Sally J. Aubury, an SLGG partner who is heading up the new office. "And the second reason is we do have an existing client base in the Valley, and it's beginning to travel up into Ventura County, so the timing was ideal to grow our client base here."

Aubury, who was recruited from the U.K. where she had been in private practice for about 10 years, joined the firm in 2000. She was named a partner in 2005.

The other partner stationed at the new Warner Center office is Andrew L. Gantman, who works in the firm's tax services area.

The firm set its sights exclusively on the Warner Center area because of its central location and proximity to the growing market in the Conejo Valley.

"With the businesses springing up along the 101 Corridor it made sense to have an office stationed here to have more of a presence in the community," said Aubury.

The 47-year-old firm, which includes SEC, enterprise risk management, forensic accounting and IT practices, has been opening new locations as business clusters have sprung up in outlying areas of L.A. Beginning with the addition of an Orange County office about 30 years ago, SLGG added an Inland Empire location about four years ago and expects to open in San Diego by mid-2007.

To combat the growing traffic problems, the firm several years ago opened a facility in Monterey Park that allows employees who live in the San Gabriel Valley to drop in for the day or a morning as they wait for traffic to die down or to negotiate personal time for such things as doctor's appointments or a child's soccer game. Employees are not permanently attached to the office, but while there, they have the use of conference rooms, faxes, copiers, computers and other office support.

That move won SLGG a practice innovation award from "Practical Accountant" magazine this year.

"In this profession, competition for employees has been fierce for a few years," said Aubury. "So yes, it was one of the driving forces. We pride ourselves on looking after employees and if we make their job easier by reducing their commute, we want to do it."

The passage of Sarbanes-Oxley has so increased the workload for accounting firms with public company practices, that the effects have spilled over to the rest of the industry, creating labor shortages and resulting in heightened recruitment efforts and increased salaries at nearly all firms.

Earlier this year, a survey of about 1,000 hiring managers at accounting firms nationwide, 55 percent said finding qualified applicants was "difficult" or "very difficult" and another 34 percent said the task had become more difficult compared to a year ago.

While salaries have been rising steadily, particularly for the jobs in most demand, the shortage of qualified applicants has turned attention to retention.

"There is strong demand by employers for highly skilled employees to fill staff level positions," said Max Messmer, chairman and CEO of Robert Half International, a staffing and consulting firm specializing in the financial services industry. "The need has been especially pronounced in accounting and finance where corporate governance mandates

have resulted in the creation of accounting jobs that did not exist five years ago.”

SLGG has been growing at a rapid pace and currently employs about 218 workers including 28 partners.

But as the firm moves into the Valley market, it is likely to face a different set of dynamics. Like SLGG, many of the larger firms in the Valley are privately held. Like SLGG they are large enough to offer a wide range of support services and yet small enough to allow clients direct access to partners, something that has long been a selling point for these firms as they compete against the Big 4.

Aubury said she is confident the firm can carve a niche in the Valley.

“I think there’s enough work out there for all of us,” she said. “We can service some of the firms the Big 4 can’t service. “We’re large enough to have all the technical services, but at the same time, we’re small enough to be personal.”

---

**San Fernando Valley Business Journal, Copyright © 2006, All Rights Reserved.**