

suburban life

Led by Julia Brufke Wenger, industry disruptor **Phoenix Tax Consultants LLC** combines strategic tax planning, unparalleled expertise, and pioneering technology to offer "a new way of doing taxes."

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SI PARTNER PROFILE

Julia Brufke Wenger, the owner and founder of Phoenix Tax Consultants LLC

Phoenix Rising

Industry disruptor **Phoenix Tax Consultants LLC** combines strategic tax planning, unparalleled expertise, and pioneering technology to offer “a new way of doing taxes.”

With this year’s tax-filing deadline quickly approaching, a sense of unease permeates the air. Taxpayers across the country wring their hands as they prepare for the task at hand. Perhaps their returns have become too complex, or they feel that changes in federal law have muddied the waters, or they fear making a mistake that could dramatically undercut or delay their refund.

Julia Brufke Wenger, EA, CFP®, ChFC®, MSFS, understands taxpayers’ apprehension. After all, she believes that tax filing should be left to the professionals. She cautions, however, that not all tax preparers are created equally.

“Tax filing should not be a DIY activity,” says Wenger, the owner and founder of Phoenix Tax Consultants LLC, which is based in Phoenixville. “We’ve caught mistakes on even the most basic returns. Philosophically, we incorporate strategic planning into every return. Whether it’s someone just starting out who has a straightforward W2 or it’s a high-net-worth client with a very complex return that includes investments and stock options, strategic tax planning benefits everybody.”

As part of its approach to handling tax re-

leases the education credit, that in turn pays for the 401(k) contribution. Software won’t tell you that.”

Since Wenger founded Phoenix Tax Consultants practice in 1990, the practice has grown to provide year-round advisory services to approximately 2,000 clients across the country, concentrated mostly in the Philadelphia area. All of the practice’s tax specialists—CPAs, enrolled agents, and tax attorneys, among them—have obtained advanced degrees and certifications. Some of them hail from the area’s most prestigious local universities, such as Drexel, Penn, Temple, and Villanova.

“It’s a really important relationship, so we want clients to work with people they feel comfortable with,” Wenger adds. “Everyone on our team is a good technician, but chemistry is important, too. Our clients should feel like they have a good rapport with our people so they can get to those next-level conversations.”

Wenger describes Phoenix Tax Consultants as a “disruptor” in the industry in part because of its pioneering embrace of virtual

by **BILL DONAHUE**
photography by **NINA LEA PHOTOGRAPHY**

turns, Phoenix Tax Consultants strives to engage clients in “next-level conversations” that have the potential to affect their financial lives for the long term. One such conversation may help an entrepreneur realize tax savings by changing their small business to a different legal entity, while another may help a pre-retiree utilize a retirement account more effectively.

“We can recommend making changes in contributions to a retirement account that completely change the tax return,” Wenger says. “For example, if you are a taxpayer with a child in college, you have availability to a significant education credit. But if you make too much money, you may be unable to participate in that credit. We could recommend putting a certain amount in your 401(k), which re-

tax preparation. This “new way of doing taxes” marries the intimacy of a face-to-face meeting with the convenience of remote technology.

“It’s like coming to a brick-and-mortar location but without having to come to our office,” she adds. “Basically, we schedule a meeting through an online conferencing platform. We can gather information through a secure portal and have face-to-face conversations in a very personal way. Some of our clients used to live in the area but have moved elsewhere, and this technology has allowed us to move with them. I have clients from when we first started this practice, and they have since become multigenerational clients. I want the same for our virtual clients, too.”

Besides leading Phoenix Tax Consultants, Wenger is a partner with a locally based wealth-management firm, Bala Financial Group Inc. The affiliation ultimately benefits clients of both entities, she says, because strategic tax planning and financial planning go hand in hand.

“Frankly, I can’t understand how a financial planner can give recommendations without the perspective of a client’s tax situation,” she says. “Someone can get a great return on an investment, but if they lose money on a bad tax decision, they’re clearly not getting the best outcome. We’re very holistic from that standpoint.”

Wenger finds satisfaction in getting “great results” for her clients. As the tax-filing deadline looms, she looks forward to helping more new clients realize the long-term benefits of her practice’s strategic approach.

“If someone drops a \$100 bill on the sidewalk, they have no problem spending an hour to go back and look for it,” she says. “At the same time, we find that some people are OK with losing thousands of dollars a year on taxes because it’s not tangible to them. People work hard for their money, and they should take the time to find out how to preserve it. That’s our job.” ■



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