

# suburban life

*Cheers!*  
pg. 20



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page 14



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# Plan of Action

Led by **Julia Brufke Wenger**, Phoenix Tax Consultants strives to maximize tax returns for each client with strategies tailored to their specific goals and circumstances.

BY **MATT COSENTINO** | PHOTO BY **NINA LEA PHOTOGRAPHY**

**T**his time of year can be physically and mentally exhausting for accountants. Needless to say, the push toward the April 15 deadline comes with a lot of long work days and even extra shifts at night or on the weekend.

Julia Brufke Wenger is the founder and CEO of Phoenix Tax Consultants, which files close to 2,500 tax returns annually for a wide array of clients. Even though she has spent several decades contending with the demanding nature of tax season, she still looks forward to it every year. The reason: She enjoys the challenge and the opportunity to help others.

“To me, every tax return is a project, and when I finish a project and see a really positive result, it’s very rewarding,” she says. “You get to know a person, you get to know what they’ll need for their tax return, you get to know ahead

of time that their child is graduating college next year and they won’t get that deduction anymore. If you know the person and you know their circumstances, you can do such a good job for them.”

Technology has come a long way since Wenger started her business. While she embraces the latest technological advances, she says no technology can replace the value of personal relationships. She and her experienced team also offer insights that may be overlooked by someone filing their own taxes through an online system.

“A lot of times we have people come in and they don’t even realize what they’re eligible for,” she explains. “They might have an education credit or some other kind of credit that they never knew about. For example, we’ve had people who are supporting a parent in a nursing

home, and they didn’t realize they could claim that parent as a dependent even though the parent didn’t live under their roof. So we’ve gone back and amended their returns to get some of the benefits associated with that relationship, and saved them a lot of money.”

Depending on the client’s situation, Wenger and her team have a host of recommendations that may be financially advantageous. The tactics might include utilizing certain accounts, such as a Roth IRA, for better tax efficiency; contributing to a health savings account; keeping taxable income low to reduce health insurance premiums in retirement; or optimizing deductions. They may even have suggestions that can be applied to the previous tax year.

Following the filing, each client receives a second tax minimization meeting at no charge to plan ahead for next year.

“It’s a brief meeting to give them some really powerful suggestions on what they can do in the current year to get a better outcome,” Wenger says. “It’s very rare, whether it’s someone with a small, starting income or someone with a complicated situation, that we can’t have an impact.”

Another aspect that sets Phoenix Tax Consultants apart is its sister firm, Bala Financial Group, where Wenger is a partner and a CERTIFIED FINANCIAL PLANNER™. Because financial planning and tax strategies go hand in hand, many clients work with both companies.

“I started originally as a tax firm, but people would always ask me financial planning questions,” she adds. “We have clients who just come to us for tax returns, and we’re completely supportive of that and love working with them. Then we have clients who come to us for taxes and eventually realize that the synergy between our planning and our tax capabilities is really powerful, so they become clients on both sides.”

Phoenix Tax Consultants caters to a diverse range of clients. Wenger particularly enjoys working with those in the “sweet spot” who may need more than a small, one-accountant firm can provide but are concerned about being “just a number” at a large company.

“There’s a whole group of people in the middle who are looking for an experienced tax practice that can give them some strategic tax planning,” she says. “They need that confidence. It’s the person who has a house, might have a second home, probably has a couple of brokerage accounts, a few stock options, maybe a small side business or a couple of rental properties. Those are the types of clients we’re really good at helping improve their situation.” ■

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## Phoenix Tax Consultants

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