

MEMBER PROFILE

PAMELA KOLOCHUK CPA, CGA
CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER
PEAK OF THE MARKET



CPA

CHARTERED
PROFESSIONAL
ACCOUNTANTS
MANITOBA



Pamela Kolochuk, CPA, CGA grew up on a dairy farm south of St. Claude in southern Manitoba. Her first job wasn't at a fast food outlet or department store – she picked strawberries in the Manitoba sunshine.

"I remember you got paid by the pail so you had to be a fast picker," Kolochuk recalls with a laugh. Perhaps it makes sense then that years later, she would be named CFO at Peak of the Market, the grower-owned not-for-profit vegetable supplier that has operated in Manitoba for 75 years.

But the path from filling single pails of strawberries to helping oversee an organization that ships thousands of pounds of vegetables all over the world would not be so obvious at first.

"Well for starters, when I was growing up I wanted to be a lawyer. That was my thing," she explains.

But while attending high school in Miami, Manitoba she took an accounting class.

"It was a grade 11 class and the teacher was great. I remember being very good at it and thinking that it was a lot more fun than I thought it would be. After that, I decided that maybe I wanted to be an accountant instead," Kolochuk recalls.

By the time she enrolled at the University of Manitoba, she had made up her mind that accounting was going to be her focus.

"I stayed in residence my first year of university. It was a great way to meet lots of people and be involved with what was going on at the campus," she says.

After graduating with a double major in accounting, her first job was a brief stop with the Government of Canada.

"I got a job doing agricultural insurance claims. Although I was thankful for the opportunity, I discovered before long that it wasn't the right fit and I wanted something with a faster pace," Kolochuk shares.

“ I love projects and this was a big one that involved over 40 locations, five offices and four divisions... ”

She found that pace at Arnold Bros. Transport as a fuel accountant.

"I learned a lot and enjoyed my time there. Actually, I met my husband there. He was the IT manager," she explains.

Before long, Kolochuk was on the move again. This time she went to work for Cargill and it was there a few important things happened. "I got a lot of really great experience during that time learning about agriculture accounting, foreign exchange risk and operations. I also made some great friends and found a great mentor. The other important thing I did was begin work on my

accounting designation,” she says.

It was a busy time but three years later she had obtained her designation and was looking for her next challenge. She set her sights on a Masters of Business Administration through Laurentian University.

“I was working on my MBA when I got a call from Parrish & Heimbecker (a Canadian family-owned firm committed to agribusiness and the agri-food industry) who was looking for a controller.”

Kolochuk would spend the next nine years there in different roles.

“Initially, there were only 12 of us in the office, including the

“
My accounting designation opened a lot of doors that led to those experiences.
”

President and VP. It was a really interesting and rewarding time to be there. Although it was a very established company when I was hired, we started growing and expanding at a fairly rapid pace as we sought to keep up with the changing agribusiness landscape. I ended up implementing a lot of month-end and quarterly reporting. HR and operations were also part of my responsibilities and working with the elevators and the staff was always rewarding. I also implemented a student summer program that is still in effect today,” she recalls.

While at Parrish & Heimbecker, Kolochuk had two daughters. When she returned from maternity leave for the second time, the landscape in the company was changing.

“When I came back to work, the company was implementing a new financial and grain operations system and they asked if I wanted to be part of that project. I love projects and this was a big one that involved over 40 locations, five offices and four divisions that were consolidating into one. How could I say no?”

The two-year project saw Kolochuk travel a lot across Canada, mostly to places in Ontario.

“It was a very rewarding experience. I worked with an awesome team and met some great people along the way, including some who have since influenced my career path and continue to be mentors,” she explains.

The software implementation was completed both on time and within budget, meeting all project objectives.

“It was such a high and when it was over, I was in something like ‘project depression’. I decided to take some time off to spend with my family and consider what I wanted to do next,” she remembers.

What happened next was fairly unexpected.

“First I worked for about half a year for G3 Canada helping them with project management following their acquisition of the Canadian Wheat Board. After that I got a call from a friend who

asked me to come work for him and his new app Pricerazzi.”

Even though she had never worked for a tech start-up before, she liked the idea and decided to give it a try.

“It’s a whole different experience at a company like that. Every day you are trying to survive and deal with investors and customers while building your processes and procedures from scratch.”

Although she enjoyed her time there she eventually moved on and found another young tech-based company called Upfeat.

“Upfeat was interesting because they are based in Winnipeg but do business in Canada, the UK, Australia and the United States with employees and partners all over the world. We had to figure out business and tax rules in each country, along with their different employment rules and currencies.”

With an impressive array of diverse work experience to pull from, Kolochuk has some advice for those considering a career in accounting.

“Do it. It should be your first choice because it opens up so many doors. I’ve done project management, operations, agriculture, tech and software implementation. I’ve also been able to

“
We had to figure out business and tax rules in each country, along with their different employment rules and currencies.
”

volunteer and give back. I repelled down the RBC building as a part of Drop Zone and raised over \$10,000 for the Society for Manitobans with Disabilities. I led a project at my children’s school to fundraise and build a new \$200,000 playground. I have a wide and diverse group of friends and colleagues. My accounting designation opened a lot of doors that led to those experiences.”

As for how she came to be at Peak of the Market?

“About six months or so ago I got a call from a recruiter regarding the role. It sounded interesting and very much suited to my experience, and it was in agriculture. After a lengthy interview and exploratory process for both the company and I, we decided it would be a great fit. I am involved in all areas of business, including sales, administration, finance, and operations. So far, it’s been a great learning experience,” Kolochuk says.

Although Peak of the Market is focused on vegetables, it’s easy to see how the woman who grew up on a dairy farm picking strawberries off the vine has found an opportunity that seems tailor-made for her.