

MEMBER PROFILE



JENNIFER ASH, CPA, CMA

VICE PRESIDENT, FINANCE AND OPERATIONS
FRONTIERS NORTH ADVENTURES

Jennifer Ash, CPA, CMA, began her career in 1993 at Royal Roads Military College (now Royal Roads University) in Victoria, BC. Two years later, when the Military College closed its doors due to defence spending cuts, she was sent to the Royal Military College of Canada in Kingston, Ontario where she completed a Bachelor of Arts in Business Administration. Ash would spend the next 16 years working as a military officer, specializing in finance and travelling around the world.

After graduating, Ash got her start working in administration and finance for the Canadian Forces Air Navigation School located in Winnipeg. A few years later, she was off to Halifax to continue her career in an accounting role for the Department of National Defence, with a stop in Ottawa before returning to Winnipeg as the Deputy Controller for 17 Wing. By 2007, she was ready for her next big challenge.

"I was selected for a position in the United Nations' Joint Logistics Operations Centre in Khartoum, Sudan. One year after returning to Canada, I filled a rotation as the Deputy Chief of Finance with NATO in Kandahar, Afghanistan. Both were incredible experiences and I loved engaging with the communities in both countries, although the scenarios were very different with each deployment," says Ash.



As a CPA, you're trained to assess the risks while always keeping key stakeholders in mind and what is in their best interest. For me, one of my stakeholders is the environment. ”

By 2011, she was back in Ottawa considering where to go next. With a move to Winnipeg on the horizon, she decided to pursue her accounting designation.

"A mentor of mine was a professional accountant and encouraged me to pursue that as well. I am so thankful that he did. Although I was mid-career at the time and had accounting experience, earning a designation rounded out my skill set and provided opportunities that I wouldn't have had otherwise."



After receiving her designation and working as the Comptroller of 17 Wing Winnipeg, she decided to make a change. In 2013, Ash accepted the position of Vice President, Finance and Operations at Frontiers North Adventures (FNA), a Manitoba-based tourism company which implores potential guests to 'Join the Adventure'. It's a perfect fit for Ash.

In her current role, Ash now leads the finance, operations and information systems teams in FNA's Winnipeg and Churchill offices. She also leads the teams working at Churchill's Tundra Inn & Restaurant, which FNA recently acquired.

"That last day in uniform was a hard one for me, as I loved my career in the Canadian Forces and to be honest, I never thought I would leave it. But my new role is quite diverse as every day presents new challenges. I work with an amazing group of people who are truly passionate about the north and sharing their passion with guests from around the globe. It's very inspiring!"

Ash's CPA designation has helped her provide strategic leadership to FNA by understanding the quantifiable risks that are associated with the business. In Ash's case, she is consciously aware of the role that climate change, and its effects, could have on the organization moving forward.

"As a CPA, you're trained to assess the risks while always keeping key stakeholders in mind and what is in their best interest. For me, one of my stakeholders is the environment."



Ash, middle, with FNA staff in Churchill

For a company that specializes in connecting polar bears, other arctic wildlife and scenery to people around the world, this is critically important.

"Sustainability is engrained in the ethos of the company and we're always looking for ways that we can improve our operations while still being environmentally conscious. From lanyard recycling programs, to eliminating plastic water bottles, to reducing our footprint with our air charters and Tundra Buggies, we are hoping that these seemingly small changes inspire our guests to think differently about the environment," says Ash.

"Not only does FNA seek to reduce their environmental impact on current initiatives and procedures, but being mindful about the environment is always top of mind when it comes to how they plan for the future. The question with any company decision is: how can we make this more sustainable?" she adds.

“Just go for it. CPAs can be found in every industry, so figure out what interests you and there will be a way to factor a CPA designation into that equation.”

Ash and her team are involved in the production of the company's sustainability report and are in the process of gathering data for the next report. These documents help the organization understand key metrics and measure how they can improve in the future.

"The reports help us more formally assess our efforts and share the results in a way that we hope creates awareness and resonates with our guests and stakeholders. From these reports, we have learned a lot in the process. We were inspired to develop a sustainability workshop, facilitated by a trusted expert who is also a CPA. The workshop is designed to assist businesses with determining how they can embrace sustainable practices in their workplace. Plus, the beautiful scenery and wildlife makes for a memorable learning experience."

Ash took a moment to reflect on her career so far and offer advice for those considering the CPA designation. She encourages future CPAs to follow their passion and remember that everyone's journey is different and not without their challenges.

“Earning a designation rounded out my skill set and provided opportunities that I wouldn't have had otherwise.”

"Just go for it. There is such diversity out there. CPAs can be found in every industry, so figure out what interests you and there will be a way to factor a CPA designation into that equation."

Ash's role with FNA connects her to what she's passionate about - being outdoors and immersed in nature. She credits the designation with helping combine her passions to live a life that she loves.

"It's always a joy to work in Churchill. I've had days where I work on financial and operational strategy in the morning and then head out on the water later in the afternoon to paddle with Beluga whales. And it's hard to have a bad day when the view from your office features a polar bear or the Northern Lights."