

# Aldrich Kilbride and Tatone LLC

## Thirty-year-old professional services firm thrives

BY DAWN WEINBERGER  
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Aldrich Kilbride and Tatone LLC is more than three decades old, but that doesn't keep the Salem-based professional services firm from experiencing significant growth spurts. In the last three years alone, the company's revenue jumped 42 percent — from \$10.85 million in 2004 to \$15.37 million in 2006.

"The reason we [have grown] is because we have really good clients that grow," says Steve Tatone, the company's president and chief executive officer.

With a second office in Lake Oswego, AKT provides these clients with services like accounting, tax preparation and auditing. Through its three affiliates, AKT Wealth Advisors, AKT Retirement Plan Services and AKT Benefit Advisors, the company also offers investment management advising for "high-wealth individuals" as well as guidance to businesses as they outline employee pension plans and bene-

fit packages.

"What we do is we help clients achieve goals, and we help them identify opportunities and solve problems," Tatone explains.

Founded in 1973 by then 32-year-old Kent Aldrich (who also served as Salem's mayor in the mid 1970s), AKT began as a basic accounting firm.

Growth was fairly slow until 1990. That's when Aldrich (now retired) decided to kick it up a notch, Tatone says, by introducing what he refers to as their "industry niche-ing model."

Under this model, each employee is assigned to a team.

Each team works only with clients in its niche industry. Typically, team leaders are experts within that specific industry — the construction niche, for example, has a leader with 15 years of direct construction experience at the helm. Other niches include telecommunications and electric utilities, health care, government and nonprofits, and agribusinesses such as wineries and family farms.

With the niche model in place, the



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AKT's growth is simple, says CEO Steve Tatone: "We have really good clients that grow."

company grew rapidly between 1990 and 1998, Tatone says. Things then slowed down for a few years as the company transitioned from an accounting firm to a comprehensive professional services company. But the slowdown was short-lived. Now, the company is meeting or exceeding 15 percent growth every year. Tatone expects even higher numbers for 2007, thanks in part to a merger in January with Grice Lund and Tarkington, a San Diego-based CPA and consulting firm.

The continuing financial growth will allow AKT to grow by serving more and more businesses.

"We would like to start a new niche every two years," says Mark Birge, one of the company's owners.

Likely possibilities include manufacturing, financial services and wholesale/resale distribution.

Birge points out that the company's habit of meticulous planning is a key growth factor.

"You can't grow unless you have a plan for what you want to be," he says.

While Tatone credits a stable of excellent clients with helping the company succeed, he is quick to point out that each of AKT's 200 employees — 50 of whom work at satellite offices in Mumbai or Coimbatore, India — play significant roles as well. The culture, he says, is very team-oriented and they strive to assemble groups of people who work well together.

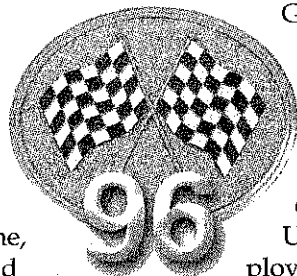
They also look for goal-oriented individuals who are driven to succeed. An MBA with a finance concentration is not necessarily a requirement for new hires.

"If we can find good people who have the right values, we can teach them the accounting stuff," Birge says.

They are particular about the clients they take on, too. Before signing on the dotted line, Tatone, Birge and the niche leaders assess whether the relationship is beneficial to both parties.

"The best fit for us are clients that have values like ours," Birge says. "We [want] clients that value us as more than just a provider of tax or accounting services, that value our ability to help them grow."

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