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**Scott Seefeld**

*The Titus Group to expand into Atlanta, Houston markets*

# Accounting for growth



**Ronald Bocciardi**

# Accounting for growth

## THE TITUS GROUP TO EXPAND INTO ATLANTA, HOUSTON MARKETS

BY ANDREW WEILAND, of SBT

Capitalizing on the growing need for independent auditors, The Titus Group Inc. plans to expand by opening offices in several new markets over the next decade.

Company founders Scott Seefeld and Ron Bocciardi already are interviewing applicants to work in offices the company plans to open in Atlanta and Houston. Those markets are fertile for corporate headquarters of publicly held companies.

The Titus Group, which provides internal audits, accounting and technology and tax services, plans to open offices in one to two additional markets each year until 2010. That's remarkable growth for a 3-year-old company that currently employs about 60 people at its Milwaukee headquarters in the Historic Third Ward and already has offices in Chicago and Indianapolis.

"We don't want to open offices just to open offices," said Seefeld, president of The Titus Group. "We have to have the right leaders in place. I don't want to force it. I've seen companies force it, and it doesn't work out."

"Our growth is only limited by our ability to find the best and brightest people," said Bocciardi, vice president of firm.

The consulting company's new offices will be established in large, growing markets, Seefeld and Bocciardi said.

They plan to focus their expansion in the South and Midwest until the economy improves, before opening offices on the East and West coasts.

"Sooner or later, we are going to expand to the coasts," Seefeld said. "We're waiting for the coasts to get the wind at their backs in this economy."

The Titus Group's growth has been spurred in part by the Public Company Accounting Reform and Investor Protection Act, also known as the Sarbanes-Oxley Act.

President George W. Bush signed the act into law last year in an attempt to discourage accounting scandals such as those involving Enron Corp. and WorldCom Inc.

The federal law prevents accounting firms from performing consulting work for publicly traded companies they are auditing. The law has created business opportunities for The Titus Group to perform independent audits for publicly traded companies seeking to comply with the new law.

"We provide the added independence to the whole process of executing Sarbanes-Oxley," Bocciardi said.

Helping corporations comply with the new law

accounts for about 20% of the work The Titus Group provides for its clients.

The law also mandates certification of financial reports by top executives and increased penalties for executives who commit corporate fraud. A chief executive officer or chief financial officer who certifies false financial reports could be sentenced to 20 years in prison and receive a fine of up to \$5 million.

Seefeld and Bocciardi believe another reason their business has grown is because they have an edge over many of their competitors, which are publicly traded companies with higher overhead costs.

As a privately held firm, The Titus Group can move more nimbly than the publicly traded companies it serves.

Seefeld and Bocciardi believe their services are of similar quality, but cost less than those provided by publicly owned firms.

"We don't have a desire to go public," Bocciardi said. "We have a desire to stay leaner and offer better value to our clients."

Many of The Titus Group's customers are concerned about the costs of complying with the new federal regulations, Seefeld said.

"Sarbanes-Oxley has been a huge regulatory issue for a lot of large publicly traded companies," he said. "They're looking for more affordable ways to comply with the act. If they can do that in a quality way in a much more affordable manner, they are very interested in that."

The Titus Group has more than 100 clients, including some of the largest in the three markets it serves. The firm's client roster includes BP Amoco Corp., Kraft Foods Inc., The Tribune Co., Conesco Inc., Journal Communications Inc., Miller Brewing Co., Rockwell Automation Inc., Marcus Corp. and Wisconsin Energy Corp.

Seefeld, 36, and Bocciardi, 37, have worked together for more than 10 years. They first worked for BDO Seidman. Prior to starting The Titus Group, Seefeld and Bocciardi were executives at Jefferson Wells International (formerly known as AuditForce and now part of Manpower Inc.), which they helped grow from a company with 12 employees to a corporation with 1,400 employees, \$175 million in annual revenue and 24 offices across the United States and Canada.

"We took a lot of things we learned from Jefferson Wells, but also we felt we could do other things better," Seefeld said.

They opened their first office for The Titus Group in Indianapolis in September of 2000 and opened the Milwaukee and Chicago offices a year later.

"With the recession starting and Sept. 11,



### THE TITUS GROUP INC.

**YEAR FOUNDED:** 2000

**SERVICES OFFERED:** Internal audit, accounting and technology, tax services.

**LOCATION:** 126 N. Jefferson St. Suite 280, Milwaukee

**OTHER OFFICES:** Chicago, Indianapolis

**LEADERSHIP TEAM:** Ron Bocciardi, vice president; Scott Seefeld, president

**NUMBER OF EMPLOYEES:** 60

**WEB SITE:** www.thetitustrp.com

there were some challenging obstacles thrown at us," Seefeld said. "But 15 months after opening, we were profitable, and we have never looked back since. Our profits are very solid, they're very strong. I'm really proud of our team and our ability to do it and grow in tough economic times. We have no debt. All three of our offices are profitable."

Each of the accountants at The Titus Group have at least seven years of professional experience.

The quality of the employees and the personal relationships they build with their clients are the greatest strengths of the company, Seefeld and Bocciardi said.

"We are very passionate about client relationships," Bocciardi said. "That's something that gets me out of bed in the morning and really charges me up."

The Titus Group was named to this year's Future 50 list of fastest-growing young companies by the Metropolitan Milwaukee Association of Commerce and its Council of Small Business Executives.

Although the company plans to open new offices in several larger markets, Seefeld and Bocciardi said the firm's headquarters likely will remain here.

"I see us staying in Milwaukee," said Seefeld, who grew up in the area. "I have very strong family roots here. I love Milwaukee. It's a great city."