
Lucy Key Price, CPP

By her own admission, Lucy Key Price, CPP is by nature a quiet and introspective person with a somewhat serious demeanor—but there is much more to APA's next President than first meets the eye. That cool, calm, and collected facade is only one facet of this soft-spoken woman's character, as I quickly discovered. As we talked, the reserved exterior melted away to reveal a warm and personable individual with a sunny outlook and quick wit. Dedicated and hard working, Lucy has accomplished a great deal in her life both professionally and personally, but it takes some prodding to get her to speak candidly about her achievements. When she does, there are plenty of them to discuss.

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By Monty Montgomery

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Payroll Professional
Extraordinaire

Meet APFA's Next President



Lucy Key Price, CPP

Professional Accomplishments

For over two decades, Lucy ran the payroll department of National Supply Company, a job she “fell into” by replacing a colleague who got married and moved away. During that time, she moved up the corporate ladder from a one-person office to the company’s headquarters where she eventually managed three finance departments simultaneously—payroll, inventory accounting, and accounts payable. In 1989, her career took a new turn when she accepted a consulting position with CDG & Associates, a decision she didn’t make lightly. “After 25 years with one company it was a risk for me,” she says, remembering the decision-making process as if it were yesterday. “Would I still be involved in payroll? Would I still use the management skills I’d learned? Could I still teach workshops, volunteer for the APA, and keep my CPP up to date?” The answer turned out to be “yes” on all counts, and 13 years later Lucy has never regretted her decision.

The new job did, however, change her lifestyle. Today, she spends most of each week away from home, working with clients onsite at their companies, which prevents her from participating in local chapter events. She still has time for hobbies, though. “Anyone who knows me knows that I love to shop, but I also like to read, ski, and I’m re-learning golf. I also like to travel—some people think that’s odd since I’m in two to four airplanes a week with my job!”

A long-time member of the APA, Lucy’s involvement has ranged from the grass-roots level to National and everything in between. When she joined APA in 1984 the organization was only two years old and had a long way to go to become the world’s premier payroll organization. She immediately jumped in to help by writing questions for the first CPP exam, working to organize a Houston chapter, and participating in other activities that define the APA as we know it today.

Lucy’s years of volunteer work have been rewarding in their own right, but being chosen as APA’s Payroll Woman of the Year in 1989 and as President-Elect in 2001 are two milestones. “Words are inadequate to describe the feeling,” she said, referring to her selection as President. “To be privileged to lead our organization this year is beyond my earliest expectations and is one of the most exciting events of my life. It’s quite an honor.”



Lucy is very active with the local Houston Chapter of the APA. Pictured above are some photos of Lucy at the Chapter’s March meeting. Immediately above: Chapter members gather for a group photo; Middle: Lucy is pictured with the Officers of the Houston Chapter; Top: Lucy networks with a Houston Chapter member during the meeting.

Who Is Lucy Key Price?

In a recent interview, Lucy talked about herself, her work, and what she wants to accomplish during her year as APA's President.

Q: Where are you from?

A: I'm originally from Texas City, TX, an oil refinery town of about 40,000 residents on Galveston Bay. It's a great town of amazing strength, having survived hurricanes, explosions, and all kinds of disasters. I now live in Deer Park, TX, near Houston's NASA Space Center.

Q: How have you managed to build a career and stay close to home?

A: Well, my first job was in Houston, and when I left that job to join the company I'm with now, I didn't have to move.

Q: Tell me about your job—what company do you work for and in what capacity?

A: CDG & Associates offers consulting services in payroll, benefits, and HR systems. We specialize only in human resource-related systems, and we support about seven different software packages. We're like "ghost-busters"—we work very hard for and with our clients, we shoot straight, and we deliver success. My own role includes project management, mentoring our consultants, and ensuring quality for our accounts.

Q: Your title, Director, Engagement Management, is unusual. Can you describe what it means?

A: In CDG's consulting services, engagement management involves ensuring that the client is satisfied with the consultants and our work for them, whether we have one or multiple consultants working with the client. Our clients always come first.

Q: How does your job tie into payroll?

A: Historically, one of the first business uses of computers was for payroll; it was one of the first businesses to be automated. The implementation of software systems involves applying the functional knowledge of payroll to the technological solutions, so my payroll background is extremely relevant to my job.

Q: Let's discuss the projects you've been involved with since you joined APA in 1984.

A: My first APA project in 1984 was to help write questions for the first Certified Payroll Professional (CPP) exam. It was exciting to be involved in the development

of the exam. Later, in 1995-96, I led a team of payroll professionals for the APA Job Analysis project. [By then] the certification program was 10 years old. Our objective was to study payroll professionals' tasks and see if there had been a shift in what they do, how much time they take to do it, and how important it is to their jobs. We sent a survey out to thousands of payroll professionals and had a remarkable number of responses. The results allowed the Certification Board to make critical revisions in the exam content and emphasis.

Q: Let's talk about your career—where you've been, where you are now, and where you want to be in the future.

A: I began working because my husband was in college full-time; I kept working because I enjoyed it. I began in the accounting department in the Houston manufacturing plant of National Supply Company, a division of Armco Steel. Like most payroll people, I fell into the job. After several accounting positions, I replaced the payroll person who had moved away.

It was a small and mostly manual payroll. I was working, attending night school, studying on the weekends, and managing a family. I worked on my first systems implementation there, an automated time collection and payroll system, and I loved it! As I gained experience, there was an opening at our division's headquarters office where I eventually became supervisor of the payroll department, handling multiple manufacturing plants and salaried payrolls.

I was still an accounting major in night school and finally finished after 16 years. I soon experienced my second systems implementation, this one for payroll, HR, and benefits. Eventually, I came to manage three finance departments—inventory accounting, accounts payable, and payroll. In 1987, Armco's National Supply Company and USX's Oilfield Supply Company merged, becoming National Oilwell. That was one of the most interesting experiences of my career. Those were tough days in the oil business.

A couple of years later, as the oil business and the new company recovered, a long-time business friend, Cynthia Driskill, invited me to join her growing professional services company, which specialized in payroll, HR, and benefits functional and systems consulting. After weeks of agony, I decided to accept. It was like leaving home because I loved my job, my bosses, and the people I had worked with. I had worked in only one place for the past 25 years. But I have never regretted it.

My many years of payroll experience didn't stop
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then. I've applied it differently—every client I assist has a payroll department. I have worked with 33 clients in the 12-plus years I've been with CDG & Associates, helping with software evaluations, strategic planning, defining requirements, designing software solutions, development, testing, documenting, training, and leading various projects. I enjoy meeting people, seeing the challenges of their business, and helping them with solutions. It's quite a ride.

Q: How have you created success in your life?

A: I have worked very hard, welcomed work challenges, sought knowledge, gained valuable experience, maintained a sense of humor, and tried to keep it all balanced with what's important in life. I hope I've also respected others, been a good listener, valued others' ideas and opinions, looked for points of mutual interest, and made decisions based on solid information, a sense of fairness, and doing what's right. I do hope that's what others might say about me!

Q: As successful as your life has been, there were challenges along the way. One of the most daunting occurred in 1975. Would you care to talk about that?

A: I'm usually moved by recalling that time in my life, so I don't talk about it often. In 1975, I was stopped at a traffic light when a drunk driver hit the side of my car at 60 mph. I was pinned in, and it took an hour for the "jaws of life" to free me. I had multiple injuries, including a crushed left ankle, broken right ankle, broken pelvis, concussion, facial cuts, traumatized jaw, punctured lung, collapsed lung, and other bruises and cuts.

I was in intensive care in a coma for several days, in the hospital for several weeks, had two operations, was in casts up to my knees, in a wheelchair for awhile, on crutches, and later a cane. I was off work for four months and still had to use a cane when I returned. I lost considerable weight (I was under 100 pounds when the second cast was finally removed) because I couldn't eat—my jaw wouldn't work until after weeks of therapy.

My cousin, an orthopedic surgeon, and his group of physician friends and nurses worked wonders. I was told I might walk with a limp—but I decided not to! Later, I even learned how to snow ski. I was very lucky.

The driver of the car that hit me spent one night in the hospital for observation. Fortunately, he was not injured.

I learned some things from that experience: (1) there are positive lessons from negative events, (2) attitude is 90% of any struggle, (3) family and faith in God



Photo by Joe Abraham Studios

are treasures, (4) many amazing people care about others, (5) life is good, no matter what body part doesn't work, and (6) payroll people should cross-train someone else!

Q: You were instrumental in setting up the

Houston Chapter of the APA. Tell me about your involvement.

A: In 1985 I helped the Houston Chapter obtain its official charter. We were a small but eager group of about 20 people who were attending meetings and studying for the CPP exam, and we worked hard to increase membership. I served as Secretary/Treasurer in 1985, Chapter Coordinator in 1986, then as President in 1987. Our chapter began holding formal CPP study groups in 1986, and I helped with those for many years. When I joined CDG & Associates in 1989 I began traveling and, unfortunately, I'm rarely in town now to attend meetings.

Q: How has your APA membership benefited you?

A: It has afforded me opportunities in education and personal development, just as reading and learning have made me better at payroll. Serving on various Houston Chapter committees and in several offices, then in the roles at the national level, has given me confidence in myself. I've also met wonderful people in payroll and have developed some lifetime friendships.

Q: What do you feel are some of your greatest career accomplishments?

A: Outside of the projects at my former company and current company, I'm very proud to have co-authored a comprehensive payroll reference and study guide, *Principles of Payroll Administration*, published by Warren Gorham & Lamont, which is now in its 17th year of publication. I'm also very pleased to be invited to speak at APA local chapter meetings, statewide conferences, the APA Annual Congress, and other industry and vendor conferences. I've experienced considerable personal growth and learned so much along the way.

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Q: Let's talk a little more about your APA involvement over the years.

A: In 1984 I received a letter from the APA asking if I would volunteer to write questions for the Certified Payroll Professional (CPP) examination. I said yes, and that started a long love affair with certification work. I've said this before publicly: that letter forever changed my life.

I served for three years on the Certification Board in the late 1980s, and again in the late 1990s for another three years, including chairing the Certification Board. In 1989 I was honored to be named APA's Payroll Woman of the Year—and it's still quite a thrill for me! I served as an APA Vice President from 1996-98, was elected Director in 1998, and served until 2001 when I became President-Elect.

Q: Do you feel that you have changed the APA in any way?

A: I'm not sure I've done anything to change the APA, but I do think I've nurtured it. From my very first involvement, the educational aspect of the organization has been the most important thing for me. I think if people don't learn and grow they get stagnant in their jobs—and we don't get promotions without growing. That's what I think the APA offers to most of us, so I've been most interested in those programs that further education and recognition for the certification programs.

Q: What kind of advice would you give your payroll colleagues?

A: Never stop learning! Continue to find ways to expand your knowledge, and stay up to date with the latest developments in the technology that supports payroll systems.

Q: What do you want to accomplish during your year in office?

A: It's all about education. With the rapid changes in technology and legislation, payroll professionals continue to need more learning opportunities. As President of the APA, my hope is to help our organization find and develop programs that will arm payroll professionals for the challenges in the workplace and raise business' awareness of the critical role of payroll. Education has always been important to me (for awhile, I thought I'd never get through college!). That's why I became so interested in APA's certification programs. And for my platform, it's important because I feel that it is through learning that we grow. And it's through growth that we improve our surroundings and

improve and serve our departments, our companies, and our profession.

Q: When your term as President is over, what do you want people to say about your leadership?

A: Most of all, I hope that when my term is over they say I inspired them to continue learning. I also hope they say I was a good representative of the payroll community, that I represented our membership well, that I recognized the right issues, promoted our profession, and inspired them to continue learning. I just hope they don't say I looked my age!

Life Outside Payroll

Despite a hectic work schedule that finds her in distant cities and on airplanes most weekdays, family is still an important part of Lucy's life. She and her husband Clayton are more like newlyweds than a couple approaching 40 years of marriage. "Clayton and I met while I was in high school, and he had just completed time in the Air Force," she recalls. "We'll celebrate our 40th anniversary in the fall, probably by going out to dinner and the theater—a hot dog and a movie, just like last year!" Lucy and Clayton have one son, Greg, who lives in Los Angeles where he works as a musician. "He's very talented; like many in L.A., he's trying to act or sing while he works at other endeavors." They also have other family members living close to their home, she says.

Clayton accompanied Lucy to San Antonio for the interview, handling the driving so she could relax before the "interrogation." He was also with her the day of the photo shoot, where he kept her smiling with his off-camera antics.

Taking the Reigns

Lucy is thrilled to be leading the APA during its 20th anniversary year, and she's especially happy that Texas is once again playing host to the Annual Congress. "I'm really looking forward to my year as President of the APA," she said. "It's going to be very exciting for me to kick it off in San Antonio because I'm a Texan. It's going to be a nice reunion."

Lucy's dedication, enthusiasm, and vision are sure to be an inspiration to all payroll professionals, and her keen grasp of the payroll industry is certain to benefit the APA during 2002 and beyond. Be sure to introduce yourself to Lucy when you see her at the 20th Anniversary Congress in San Antonio, TX, May 14-18.

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