



Raul Roa Staff Photographer

Linda Saddle mire, a partner at the certified public accounting and business consulting firm Vicenti, Lloyd & Stutzman LLP in Glendora, heads VLS Fraud Solutions, the company's fraud investigation unit.

Tracking fraud

Glendora company handles special investigations

By Kevin Smith Staff Writer

GLENDORA — Mention forensics and most people think of the hit TV series "CSI."

But in the corporate world, many of the same principles used in police work are being applied to tracking financial abuse at companies, both large and small.

And when it comes to financial forensics, Linda Saddle mire knows of what she speaks. Saddle mire is the head and founder of the fraud investigation team "VLS Fraud Solutions" at Vicenti, Lloyd & Stutzman LLP, a certified public accounting and business consulting firm in Glendora.

"Some of the most common kinds of cases we deal with are asset misappropriation schemes," Saddle mire said. "In many cases, we are dealing with occupational fraud initiated by an employee or management-level person who has access to company assets."

Bogus companies are sometimes created to bilk money from businesses, complete with false billing documents, she said.

"Payroll is an area that gets abused a lot with people skimming off the top," Saddle mire said. "People will sometimes add family or friends to the payroll, and in some cases they are getting paid but not working. In one case, a company added 77 temporary employees that didn't really exist. A supervisor masterminded that."

The 12-member VLS Fraud Solutions unit was created in 1994 and includes former FBI investigators.

A fraud hotline is also available for client companies, enabling employees to aid in investigations that could save their companies thousands of dollars.

"We have about 20 cases a year," Saddle mire said. "Some cases are very small and take a week or two, but we're also involved in much

larger ones that can take a year or two."

Saddle mire was recently awarded the Certified in Financial Forensics credential by the American Institute of Certified Public Accountants (AICPA). The credential, established a year ago by the institute, is granted to qualified CPAs who have considerable professional experience in financial forensics.

In Saddle mire's case, her experience runs deep. As a partner at VLS and a certified fraud examiner, she has logged more than 1,000 hours of forensic experience and completed 75 hours of training in this specialized field.

Stephen Winters, the AICPA's director of specialized communities and firm practice management, said about 3,200 of the organization's 350,000 members have received the Certified in Financial Forensics credential.

"That's more than we were expecting," he said. "This program was really based on what we perceived to be demand in the marketplace."

Winters said the study program includes a core set of fundamental accounting skills as well as additional specialized skills.

"There is a need to know the rules of evidence for submission in court," he said. "And they can apply those skills to a variety of sub-disciplines, including family law, estate disputes, economic damages, shareholder disputes and fraud investigations."

Saddle mire said nearly all fraud cases involve someone who has easy access to the company's funds.

"The most common mistake is just putting too much trust in one individual," she said. "With some companies there isn't a proper segregation of duties and one person is given too much control."

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