

Gary Gerson gives back to his alma mater, community, and country with five-decade career in Miami

BY SEAN MCCABE

At 82 years of age, Gary Gerson, founder and partner of Miami's **Gerson, Preston, Robinson & Company**, has a resume that reads like a CPA wish list: Amongst his **myriad of lifelong accomplishments**, he became the youngest CPA in the country at the time (21 years old in 1955), headed the Navy Area Audit Office during his military fulfillment serving in the Korean War, founded his own firm, and was a rare non-athlete to be inducted into the University of Florida's Athletic Hall of Fame.



Gerson with his original desk from 1955 (Photo: Schwartz-Media.com)

Born in Baltimore, MD in 1933, Gerson's success started when he attended the University of Florida. While earning his bachelor's in accounting, Gerson organized the first "Athletic Counselor Training Program" for the Florida Gators football team. With an office set up directly between the offensive and defensive coordinators, Gerson hired "the best 20 students in science, math, and the humanities [that] every ball player had to take." Under his tutelage, no player lost eligibility to play, and the University thanked him for his service with an Athletic Hall of Fame induction in 2002.

After serving as an Assistant Gunnery and Operations Officer on a Destroyer Escort during the Korean War, Gerson found himself as the Officer in Charge of the Navy Area Audit Office in Orlando, FL, where he handled audit reports from all facets of the Department of the Navy.

"Only the Navy would give a 23-year-old kid the head of an audit department, in charge of millions of dollars in contracts," he laughs.

"That responsibility, though, was very important in starting a firm," he says. "Whether I [was working] with a multi-million dollar manufacturing company or a small office, I had the responsibility learned."

And in 1959, Gerson did just that, becoming a founder of Gerson Preston Robinson & Co. after beginning his public accounting career a year prior. Amongst his first clients were fellow Gators from the University of Florida, Sunswept Homes - some of the first homes built in South Florida for retirees, and many Canadian expats and CPAs during Quebec's "Quiet Revolution," which saw a large influx of Canadian homeowners in the

Sunshine State.

Since 1985, Gerson became a longstanding sponsor of school scholarships for students in financial need. Amongst his first scholastic contributions were his alma mater, the New World School of the Arts, the University of Miami, and Florida International University. In 2003, Gerson dedicated the Gary R. Gerson Hall, home of the Fisher School of Accounting, to the University of Florida.



Gerson Hall at the University of Florida (Photo: ufl.edu)

Looking back, Gerson believes that up-and-coming CPAs should think outside of themselves when establishing their firms and lifelong careers.

"If you're starting a firm, you've got to do community work," Gerson advises. "All charity initiatives provide business [and] run parallel with helping the community, and that reputation leads to good businesses. Meet as many people as you can; that's how people will know you...because in the end, what do we have other than our reputation?"

"Secondly, keep up," he adds. "Read two journals every month. Assign lectures out [to your firm] – Everybody gets a chance. They'll become an expert in that category and learn to *talk* [which] they can carry over to their clients."