

## Scottsdale CPA Serves His Community

By Haley MacDonell

*The Scottsdale City Council is scheduled to meet twice a month on Tuesdays. The six councilmembers and the city’s mayor file onto the taupe dais and sit behind their name plaques. City staff sit on the other side of the room, and in the middle are Scottsdale residents ready to comment on an issue they’re passionate about.*

The council works through their agenda. A city clerk is retiring after 20 years on the job. The mayor calls for an executive session. Councilmembers ask questions about a flood hazard mitigation project for the Rawhide Wash. Each councilmember brings a unique perspective and background to the job. There is a lawyer, an architect, the president of an electrical supply company, a teacher, an electrical engineer, the founder of a computer company and a CPA.

Barry Graham is an active CPA who currently holds elected office in the state of Arizona. After taking office in January 2023, Graham now serves a four-year term on the Scottsdale City Council.

Graham’s journey into public service started long before he took his seat on the city council. He grew up and went to school in the Scottsdale public education system. After graduating from Chaparral High School, he moved to Massachusetts, where he studied and began working as a financial analyst in the state legislature. In 2011, he moved back to Arizona and started at Wallace, Plese + Dreher (WP+D), where he now works as a senior audit manager.

Since returning to the state, Graham has volunteered for more than 10 years on Scottsdale boards and on three of the city’s commissions, where he listened to residents and learned what issues were most important to the community.

The mayor and council members listen to updates about a flood mitigation project in North Scottsdale.

At the same time, he was working with many Arizona-based businesses as a CPA providing financial statement audit and review services, advising on governance, analyzing internal procedures and cultivating skills that he now brings to the table as a councilmember.

“In early 2022, I was looking at city leadership, where we were going as a city, and noticing more sentiment that local government was not listening to and respecting residents,” Graham recalled. “So, in early 2022, I made the decision to become a candidate.”

It wouldn’t be easy – he and his wife had welcomed twin sons the year before, and he intended to continue his role at WP+D – but he knew it was something he was passionate about. His volunteer experience and his life in Scottsdale became cornerstones of his campaign.

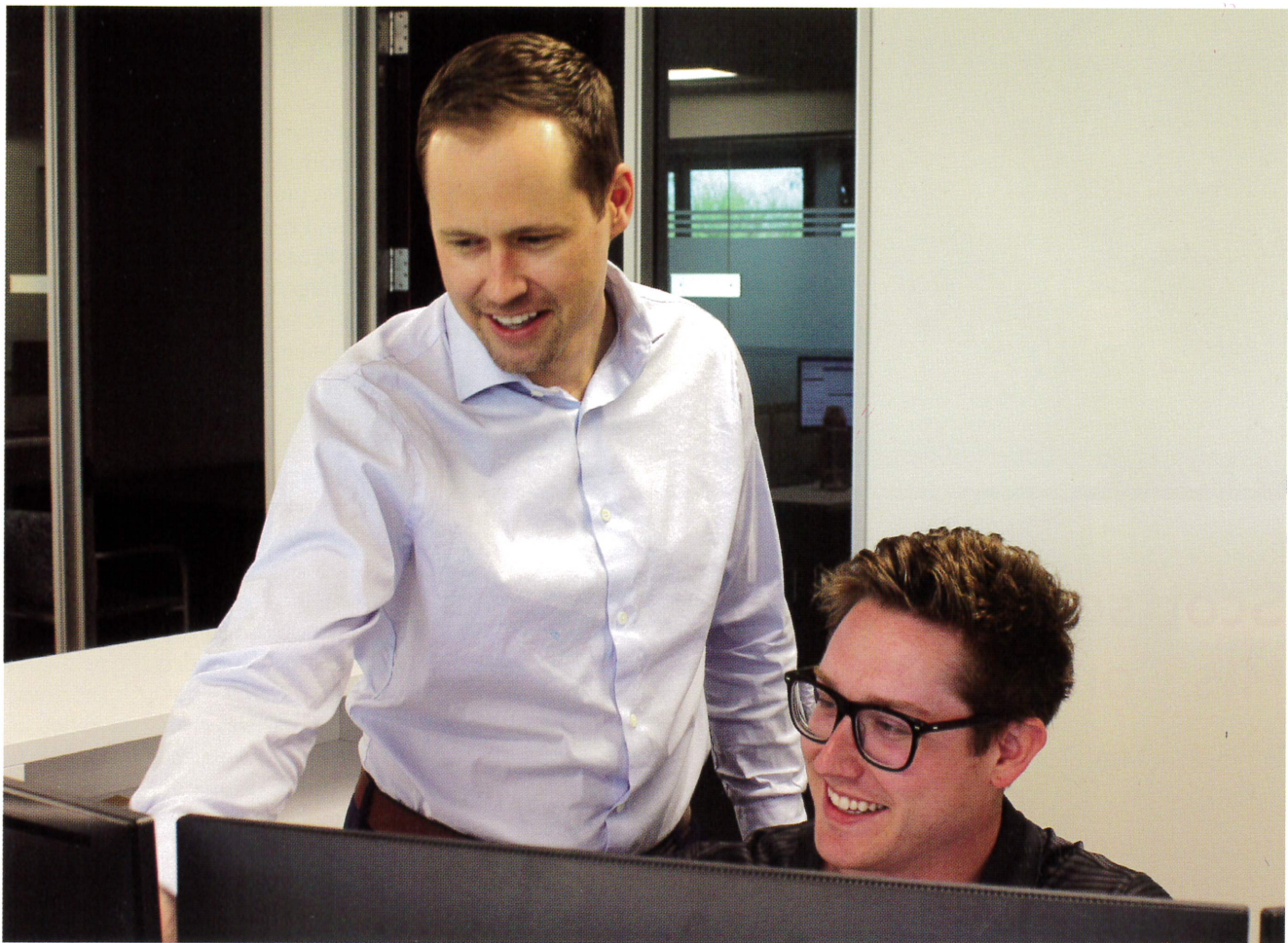
“Just like you can’t dislike accounting and become an accountant, you can’t go into community service unless you enjoy it,” Graham said. “It is a lot of hours, whether I’m serving a client or working with constituents.”

He was endorsed by other councilmembers and community leaders as council-ready and began his campaign with “Experience Matters” at the forefront. There are six city councilmembers in Scottsdale, and three are up for election every two years. In the August primary, he was the top non-incumbent by votes and advanced to the general election, where he secured his council position with nearly 47,000 votes.

“When I was sworn in in late January, I took my seat with everybody on the council,” he remembered. “I’ve known most of them for many years. I had a lot of relationships with colleagues and staff. They’ve all been very welcoming.”

*Continued on next page...*





Barry Graham has been with Wallace, Plese + Dreher since 2011.

There was so much more to learn about a city the size of Scottsdale, its quarter-million residents, over 2,700 employees and a budget exceeding \$2 billion.

“I knew a lot going into my term,” Graham explains, “but I continue to keep studying the issues that affect residents’ quality of life like public safety, parks, streets, sanitation, water, zoning and tourism. People talk about the top of the ticket items, like federal office, but the school boards and the city councils can really affect your day-to-day life.”

Graham believes his skills as a CPA help contribute to the city’s overall transparency and efficiency. While being a CPA might not be the typical path for a city councilmember, Graham is content knowing that he has supported the city he grew up in and how it’s changing. He remembers when some of the city’s busiest roads, like Thunderbird, were dirt roads, and now the city welcomes new businesses and residents every month. Graham and his fellow councilmembers have an impact on what makes the city so attractive.

*“People come here for the quality of life, and they expect and deserve a responsive local government,” Graham says. “I really encourage people to spend more time learning about who is at the bottom of your ballot, because they are going to impact your life. There aren’t too many CPA elected officials out there. I recommend that more people who are thinking about going into public service and community leadership study accounting.” ●*