



CPA helps cultural center streamline operations with the help of QuickBooks® Enterprise Solutions software



BUSINESS CHALLENGE

Sunset Center Cultural Center, Inc. was looking for uncomplicated, inexpensive mid-market accounting software specific to the nonprofit industry. They were looking for software that was easy to install and learn because they needed to be fully operational within 2 weeks. Larger capacity to track revenue and expenses of every theatre event was mandatory.



SOLUTION

QuickBooks Enterprise Solutions:

- Allows Sunset Center to easily track the money and numerous transactions of a mid-market sized nonprofit company
- Software works with greater capacity and speed
- Fraction of the cost of other mid-market applications



BENEFITS

QuickBooks Enterprise Solutions:

- Quick installation and easily learned
- Much less expensive than other competing products
- Able to track a large number of complex cost and revenue channels, process a widely varying payroll, pass audits with ease
- Evolves and grows as the company grows

CLIENT PROFILE

- Located in Carmel, CA
- Non-profit cultural center with a plan of rapid growth
- Organization developed to manage a renovated community theater complex
- Complex business with a lot of dealings that need to be managed



“The center was using the city’s accounting program and having a really tough time getting information because it was configured more for the city than it was for this specific entity. When SCC took over Sunset Center, they received seed money from the city to operate it. Sarah knew that they needed to track that money so they could properly report where the funding went. Given the large number of transactions that would have to be managed, I knew that QuickBooks Enterprise Solutions was the perfect fit.”

Ilene Eisen
CPA, CITP, ProAdvisor
Monterey, California

The beautiful Sunset Center performing arts complex in the city of Carmel-by-the-Sea, California, began life as a public school over 70 years ago. During the 1960s the school evolved into a cultural center for this seaside community, but by the late 1990s the site was in need of an extreme makeover. Following a \$21 million renovation, Carmel’s city council felt that the revitalized, 718-seat facility could better serve the public if it were operated by an outside entity. Sunset Cultural Center, Inc. (SCC) was formed, and with the guidance of QuickBooks ProAdvisor Ilene Eisen, this nonprofit’s financial staff put QuickBooks Enterprise Solutions: Nonprofit Edition to work... in just two weeks.

Since taking over from the city of Carmel, SCC has pursued a plan of rapid growth. Using QuickBooks Enterprise Solutions, the cultural center has been able to expand the number of performances where the center books and pays for acts plus all of the ancillary services necessary. As Craig Robertson, Director of Finance and Administration at the center explained, “Over the next year, we’re more than doubling the number of shows we’re producing in-house.” Enterprise Solutions has risen to the challenge by scaling to meet these demands. “One of the great things that Enterprise Solutions enables us to do easily is grow with the increased

number of shows,” Craig said. With the help of Enterprise Solutions, SCC is on track to increase operating revenue significantly this fiscal year over last year.

Complex needs lead to a flexible, high-value solution

When Sarah Brown, treasurer for SCC’s board of directors, contacted Ilene, she knew two things beforehand: 1) she didn’t want to use the complicated, expensive mid-market accounting software she’d encountered at other nonprofit organizations, and 2) the accounting solution selected must be easy to install and use—because SCC had to be up and running shortly after the contract with the city was signed in 2004. She looked to Ilene’s expertise for guidance.

“When I met with Ilene, we spent a couple of hours determining the kinds of information we [SCC] had to collect and the types of reports we needed to generate for the city,” Sarah said. “Also pressing was the fact that we had to be up and running in an extremely short timeframe. Ilene was very thorough in her analysis, and when our meeting was done I came away feeling that QuickBooks Enterprise Solutions was just what we needed.”

“Sunset Center was still being managed by the

city at the time Sarah and I met,” said Ilene, taking up the story. “The center was using the city’s accounting program and having a really tough time getting information because it was configured more for the city than it was for this specific entity. When SCC took over Sunset Center, they received seed money from the city to operate it. Sarah knew that they needed to track that money so they could properly report where the funding went. Given the large number of transactions that would have to be managed, I knew that QuickBooks Enterprise Solutions was the perfect fit.”

Sunset Center is a large facility with a number of challenging business needs. In addition to renting out the hall for a variety of big name events, SCC also stages their own productions and rents out smaller meeting rooms. It’s a complex business with a lot of dealings to keep an eye on, but Ilene knew QuickBooks Enterprise Solutions was up to the task. Plus, it could be installed quickly, easily learned, and was much less expensive than competing products—an important plus for any nonprofit organization. Free technical support and automatic program upgrades with the 12-month Full Service Plan, included at no charge, helped tilt the decision towards QuickBooks Enterprise.

Ilene also impressed Sarah with the flexibility of QuickBooks Enterprise Solutions. To get up and running quickly, SCC could install the software and start using just the essential functionality. Then, as they had more time, they could begin utilizing additional features and services and customize them for efficiency. This was in comparison with other mid-market applications, which can take months to set up. “Her ability to help us get set up very quickly and work with me to develop a chart of accounts was extremely helpful,” Sarah added.

Knowing what it takes to help a busy enterprise thrive

Sunset Center presents about 110 performances a year, plus 30-40 community events. And all of this activity has to be recorded and scrutinized. When Sarah first met Ilene, she explained to the QuickBooks ProAdvisor how one of the major objectives of SCC was to monitor revenue and expenses for every event in the theater—something not carried out under the old system. Thanks to the flexibility of QuickBooks Enterprise Solutions and Ilene’s expert skills, she was able to quickly set up every event as a job so that it could be tracked effortlessly.

The ability to get a deeper, more detailed view into their business has greatly benefited SCC. According to Craig Robertson, QuickBooks Enterprise Solutions enables him to quickly drill down into reports and determine historical costs for previous acts so that they can consider bringing in similar performers. “We’ve been able to attract some really big acts such as John Cleese (of Monty Python fame), The Preservation Hall Jazz Band, and The Temptations,” he said. “QuickBooks Enterprise Solutions gives us a very good handle on tracking expenses for preceding events,” he said. “We can look at catering expenses and equipment rentals, and how much outside labor was required. For example, when we put on a show, I can have as many as 20 to 25 union stagehands here in addition to our own staff. It’s easy for me to take the time cards and put them into QuickBooks Assisted Payroll and process paychecks quickly. It’s just one more reason why we chose Enterprise Solutions. It’s simple, flexible, they file all my taxes, and I love it.”

Having historical costs and income at his fingertips, Craig says he can easily give the executive director an idea of what they need to budget for an act before they even consider booking it. The other thing that Craig likes

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about QuickBooks Enterprise Solutions is that he can take any report and easily transfer it into Excel. “I find that to be a wonderful function for me,” he said. “It helps me a lot in projecting costs, and helps us meet our mandate from the city to increase the number and diversity of the performances staged here at the center.”

Breezing through the annual audit

From tracking show expenses, revenues and room rentals, to processing a payroll that can vary from ten to forty workers, budgeting and reporting, QuickBooks Enterprise Solutions does much to help keep Sunset Center working efficiently. Craig is particularly happy with how QuickBooks assisted in their first financial review. “We had our first annual audit here last year,” he said, “and the controls we developed around QuickBooks allowed us to have a very successful review with almost no suggestions for improvements. And the few suggestions we did receive had nothing to do with QuickBooks. We were very pleased.”

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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