

March 2014

Minnesota Insurance

How Vance Prigge Did It

The Incoming Big I
President, Lewiston Native
and Former Linebacker
Has Built a Network
of 100 Agents Generating
\$51 Million in
Annual Premium

Minnesota Insurance
1107 Hazeltine Blvd.,
MD 16
Chaska MN 55318
Return Service
Requested

Lowell Osvog's
50 Years With
Chubb Group

Two Agents
Charged With
Massive Fraud

Big I, MN NAIFA
Conventions Set

Carrie
Schoenwetter
Reaches 20th Year

Bette Martin
To Retire After
45 Years at HSB

Presorted
Standard
U.S. Postage
Paid
Little Falls
Minnesota
Permit No. 9

How Vance Prigge Built A Network

After graduating from Lewiston-Altura High School in South-eastern Minnesota, Vance Prigge went off to Luther College in Decorah, Iowa. His main goal, of course, was to graduate. But priority 1B was to play well as a linebacker on the football team. Another, call it 1C, was to have an enjoyable time. "I was definitely more of a social guy than an academic one," recalled Prigge, thereby placing him squarely in the type of college students who clearly predominate in the insurance business.

But once he graduated in 1993, Prigge got very serious about his career. Influenced by a college friend who had enjoyed interning at the Life Investors Insurance Company in Cedar Rapids, Prigge determined that was the career he wanted. He took to it immediately. Graduating from Luther on a Sunday, he completed his life insurance licensing exam the next day, and sold his first policy before the week was out. More success followed rapidly. The ex-linebacker began selling about 100 life policies annually, placing him in the company's top echelon of producers.

After three years of production in the mid 1990s, however, he realized that things were changing. Life insurance was no longer the centerpiece of his prospective clients' financial planning. He decided he needed to broaden his services. So, in 1996 when fellow church member and Lewiston agent Erwin Richter offered to sell the 25-year-old Prigge his roughly \$100,000 premium book of insurance business that included 80 percent crop/hail accounts

with the remainder Progressive auto policies, Prigge accepted.

With that book, he was able to align with independent agent Bill Srenaski in Eagan to broker additional business in 1997. Prigge opened an office in Rochester the following year and by 2003 enough volume to land his own contract with AAA. That connection also revealed to him what was later to become the cornerstone of his current business: the challenge an emerging agent has in securing companies. "I have been fortunate to be on both sides of the fence, starting Atlas as a scratch agency has given me an appreciate of what agents are dealing with and how valuable strong relationships are with carriers," he explained.

-0-

When Prigge was building his agency a decade and a half ago, the Internet had not yet come to dominate insurance marketing, which greatly influenced the name he selected for it: Atlas. He made that choice for several reasons. One was since the yellow pages phone book—which was consumers' most popular buying tool at the time—listed entries alphabetically, he wanted to be near the top of any list. The second was to not name the agency after himself so that when he achieved the size he hoped for, he would avoid having all callers ask for him personally. Another was a seminar he attended sponsored by Progressive Insurance that stressed the necessity of agents creating a brand for themselves.

When Atlas Insurance Brokers reached the \$1 million plateau in annual property-casualty premium in 2003, Prigge realized he needed help. He responded by recruiting by two associates with backgrounds similar to his in 2004. Jacob Simons was a recent college graduate (St. Thomas University) with no insurance experience. The other, Andrew Nelson, also like Prigge, had sold life insurance. With the additional producers (who are still with the agency), Atlas Brokers continued to expand.

-0-

Growth accelerated into high gear about 2006. Numerous prominent insurers with captive sales forces were completing change-



- State-of-the-art-equipment
 - Certified technicians
 - 24-hour towing
 - Lifetime warranties
 - Free loaners.
 - More half a century at the same location.

**SEND YOUR INSURED
TO US WITH CONFIDENCE.**

Pat and Donna Mulroy



**3920 Nicollet Ave S.
Minneapolis 55409
612-823-7257**

**www.mulroysbodyshop.com
donna@mulroysbodyshop.com**



Hazeltine Gates Office Building **1107 Hazeltine Boulevard • Chaska, MN 55318**

- Five story 105,000 square foot office building
- Building recently renovated ~ Outstanding views of Chaska Par 30 golf course
- Easy access to Highways 5, 41 and 212. Corner of Hwy 41 and Hazeltine Blvd.
- 200 - 25,000 contiguous square feet available for Lease
- Building amenities include on site management, underground parking, conference room(s), deli, travel agency, salon & day spa

**For Lease Opportunities
Contact Chad Aleshire at 952.361.8099
caleshire@thegoodmangroup.com**



Atlas brokers with their awards at a recent banquet: Tom Carney, Forest Lake; Sergey Kenigsberg, Plymouth; David Simmons, Apple Valley; Christine Larson, North Branch; Sean Stevens, Northfield; Jacob Simons, Rochester; Bill Nystrom, Rochester.



Vance Prigge's work role models are his parents.

overs to new marketing strategies with the consequence that many of their long-time agents began looking elsewhere to maintain their level of compensation. Prigge, recognizing that these agents were well-trained and experienced producers, began presenting them the option of becoming an independent agent and brokering business through Atlas.

Word of mouth about the opportunity spread rapidly among a receptive audience of agents for Country, Farmers, Allstate, State Farm, Liberty Mutual, Farm Bureau and American Family as well as independent agents. Over the next seven years, Atlas added an increasing number of partners. Currently, the network has over 100 agents in 75 locations in Minnesota served by more than 50 companies such as West Bend, Cincinnati, Selective, Safeco, Travelers, AAA, Progressive, and Encompass. Combined production in 2013 was over \$51 million, about 80 percent in personal lines. The rest in rapidly increasing commercial business. "We have great carriers partners that have allowed a newer agency and unique business model like Atlas an opportunity," Prigge said.

The major attractions for agents were that they retain 100 percent ownership of their book, have access to virtually unlimited markets, top commissions/contingency payments, cutting-edge technology, and a transparency which Atlas Brokers stresses. "We are all about full disclosure with our agents," Prigge explained. "For example, everyone knows exactly who our agents are as their locations are on our website. Our agents have access to commissions, production, and contingencies schedules. Anything a carrier rep shares with me they can share with our agents." Atlas agents also

have the back office support from a 15-member staff in the Rochester home office.

-0-

Atlas Brokers remains in an expansion mode, Prigge said. Most of its current agents are in southern Minnesota or the metropolitan area. Plans are to expand in all areas of the state. The Atlas standards for recruits remain rigorous. "It is pretty clear, based on our agent force, that this is not a place for neophytes as Atlas agents average 12 years of insurance experience," he emphasized. "We have been fortunate to have some of the top direct writers and independent agents in the state chose to partner with us. Our agents and staff account for the success of Atlas."

-0-

Even Prigge will acknowledge that he is a bit surprised by the size attained by the network he envisioned less than a decade ago. He is also grateful he got in his fun while he was in college, because today he does not have much time for hobbies or recreation outside of spending time with his family. Moreover, he is the incoming president of the Minnesota Independent Insurance Agents and Brokers Association—another major time consumer.

Although his schedule is very full, Prigge says, it still pales in comparison to his parents who he describes as the hardest working people he knows. His father John was a dairy farmer who spent six hours daily just milking his cows. His mother Barb was a nurse at the Mayo Clinic. "When I look at those two and the work they did," he says, "what I do is easy by comparison." ■

Otis-Magie Buys Henry A. Anderson Agency

Duluth's venerable, 84-year -old Henry A. Anderson Agency, Inc., has been acquired by the Otis-Magie Insurance Agency, Inc. The transaction will result in minimal change for customers and carriers, according to Paul Johnsen, the previous owner of the Anderson Agency, which was founded by Paul's maternal grandfather in 1930.

The absence of any abrupt change is the norm for the multi-line independent agency. Paul Johnsen, as well as his father Floyd, and Henry, Paul's grandfather and founder of the agency, emphasized warm, lengthy personal relationships with their clients,



Paul Johnsen



Tom Stender

To page 18