

Editorial...

Big companies spend millions on brand recognition advertising. They feel, and possibly correctly so, that many times the consumer buys on brand recognition. Possibly if you are buying a car, a beverage, clothing, or so many consumer products, that is so. However, when it comes to buying insurance I really don't think this is true; even though several major insurance carriers are trying to make it that way. You see, when the consumer purchases an insurance policy they are buying a piece of paper that promises to pay claims that occur as a result of an event happening. When you buy a new car, a can of soda pop, or a new dress, you are buying the color, the style, the taste, or the feel. There is a huge difference between buying a beverage, or a new dress, versus purchasing a complete insurance program. When it comes to the purchase of insurance the brand will not be the one helping you get the claim settled, even if the company's advertising implies it will. The brand will not be there being sure you get a fair claim settlement. The brand will not see that you understand what the adjustor is saying about how your claim is being settled. The brand is simply that, a brand. The brand's only job is to SELL you a product, your Independent Insurance Agent wants to KEEP you for a client. There is a huge difference.

When bad things happen, and they do, the person you want in your corner is not a brand. What you want standing next to you is your own flesh and blood agent, who represents you, who understands your insurance program, as well as the

insurance business, and who has a personal stake in seeing to it that you, the consumer get a solid, fair, complete, and on time settlement. You want someone you trust who will help keep your claim moving smoothly through the claims process. You want a person who will help explain things that you do not understand or get the adjustor to do a better job of explaining how he or she is settling the loss.

Furthermore, if someone wants to quote your insurance, and is always referring to how safe you will feel in their hands, or someone who has a big affection for geckos, or for that matter, any agent who

has only one company he or she represents: Ask this agent if they will be PERSONALLY able to help you with the loss you have. In other words, will they have any ability or authority to help you personally if there are problems on your claim? Most likely their answer will be "Gee, I sell the insurance, and the claim department settles the losses." You know what that is? The wrong answer.

It seems to me every time I turn on the TV I am bombarded with one more huge insurance company telling me how great their insurance claims service is. However, in the real world, we agents know that many times that is simply not true; with them or any other insurance company for that matter. Many times a

client will have a loss and it is a far from simple task to be sure this loss gets settled correctly in a minimum amount of time. We agents know that many things can combine to delay the claim getting settled quickly. Maybe it will be a damage estimate that was not sent in quickly enough, or a serial number is needed, or a drivers license number; or another of the hundreds of things that can move your claim to the bottom of the pile.

When this happens to you, if you happen to be insured with Western Agency, Inc., you have a very good thing going for you: a dedicated, knowledgeable, and caring staff that will talk to you anytime to get your insurance needs and questions answered. Our hours of operation are officially 8 am to 5 pm Monday - Friday. In reality it is a rare day that Chuck, Casey, Craig, Kelly, or another of our other staff that is not in the office by 7:00 am. Furthermore, we have always felt we are on call to our clients 24/7/365. Our motto for years was 25 hour per day insurance service. We still feel that way. As I have said so many times we are your friends and good friends don't let good friends fight through complicated insurance losses alone. If you have any questions or problems with any part of your insurance program, call us. We will get it taken care of.

Thanks for your business!!!!!!


Chuck Tompkins

INSURANCE Roundup

March 2005



Long Anticipated Book Off The Presses

A truck backed up to the Minot offices of Western Agency, Inc. today and delivered the first printing of *The Insurance Wars* which is the title to Chuck Tompkins' long awaited book. Tompkins, who has been threatening to put out a book on the insurance industry for years has finally made good on this promise and published *The Insurance Wars*. Early reviews are good and the book is rated a "must read" by all who have had a look at the editor's proofs. One reader said "It's impossible to read this book and not save money on your insurance." How do you know if you should read this book? To use the comedian Jeff Foxworthy's method of delivery:

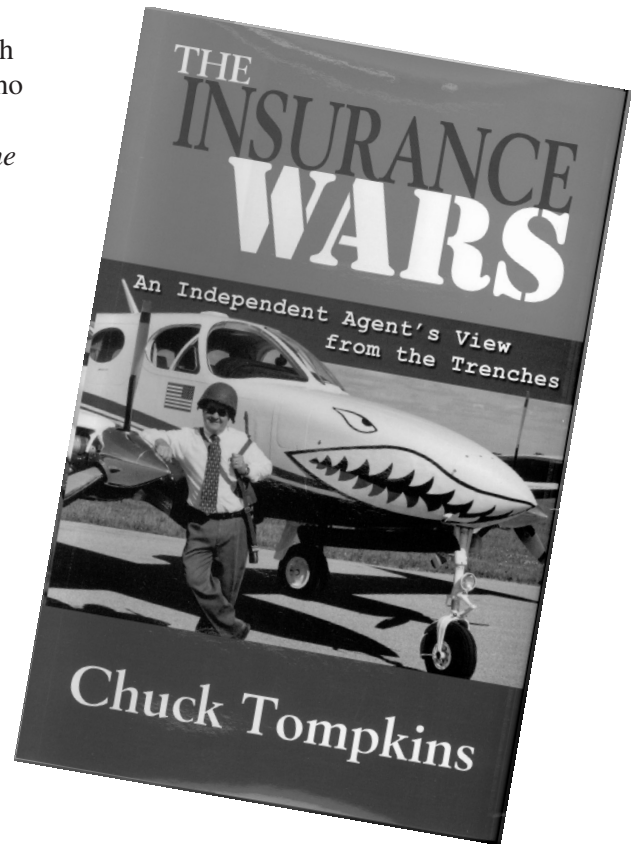
If you are a purchaser of any type of insurance, you should read this book.

If you are self employed, or starting a business, you should read this book.

If you have ever run out of credit at the bank, you should read this book.

If you have ever had to haggle with your credit card company over a major purchase, you should read this book.

And if you think you may ever have a claim on your insurance; you should FOR SURE, read this book. Copies of *The Insurance Wars* are available for sale at the offices of Western Agency, Inc. You can stop and get a copy, call us at 1-800-735-4955 and order over the phone, or simply order on the web at theinsurancewars.com.



Long Term Care A Needed Product

I can't believe it. The Baby Boomers are starting to age. Why does this concern me? Because I am one and most likely I will be using some sort of a long term care facility at some point in my life. At the present time two people in five will, at one point in their life be using a long term care facility for at least six months. With the cost per year of such a facility easily surpassing \$40,000 with many costing over \$50,000, self insurance is very difficult and this is an expense that is too large to be ignored. Since underwriting wise, the Baby Boomers are still quite young, Yes!! The cost to put together a decent long term care policy is yet very affordable for us. If you have any questions on this needed insurance or would like a quote on it, call Jim Winczewski at our Minot office and we can eliminate this worry in your life.

Westy Hat

Apparently being seen with your Westy hat is getting to be a fad all over the state of North Dakota. Be it Stan Vangsness and Butch Albers at the Carpio café, Henry Wiik at Menards in Minot, Craig Grabow at the Berthold café, Curt Kralicek in Dickinson, Jere Varburg at the FSA office, or Gary Bryans everywhere. All were seen and reported to one of our all seeing, unknown, but ever present judges. Therefore, to keep up with the demand and to reward our loyal insureds for proudly wearing their Westy hats we have seven winners of the Wear Your Westy Hat contest in this newsletter. However, we are going to change the contest still further and this month we will have a Grand Prize winner for the contest. The winner of this new category is Henry Wiik. The reason to bestow Grand Prize winner status to Henry was that perched on his head sat a Western Agency, Inc. hat which has been out of production for well over 15 years. Although somewhat worn from many washings this not so new hat was nonetheless proudly showing the world that to be properly attired in North Dakota you simply must have a Westy hat on your head. Our thanks to this group of winners for wearing their hats. Grand Prize winner Wiik will receive a \$75 gift certificate to Homesteaders Restaurant here in Minot. Vangsness and Albers will get \$50 gift certificates to Perkins Restaurant, Kralicek a \$50 gift certificate to Ralphy's Restaurant in Dickinson, Varburg and Bryans a \$50 gift certificate to Sammy's Pizza, and Grabow a \$50 gift certificate to The Tumbleweed restaurant in Berthold. Of course all winners will also receive a new Westy hat and Westy jackknife.



Insurance Shorts:

North Dakota Still Ag Related: North Dakota is rated nationally as being #1 in production of flax, sunflowers, edible beans, canola, barley, durum, pinto beans, oats, and spring wheat. Indications are this will not change soon as long as the world enjoys eating so much. Western Agency, Inc. too, is ranked #1 in North Dakota. We have achieved the honor of being the largest independent farm insurance agency in the state by insuring over 850 farms in North Dakota.

Things Chuck, Casey and Craig Don't Like: Craig really hates the Government Paper Reduction Act and Chuck and Casey heartily agree. Reason why? This act seems to have doubled the amount of paper we are supposed to wade through. Using good government logic, perhaps they should have passed the Government Paper Increasing Act. Then we probably would have seen our paper work drop in half?

Hidden Taxes: Similar to the situation where much of the price of gas is taxes added to the product, your insurance bill too has taxes hidden in it. How much are they? Enough to make insurance the sixth largest source of tax revenue in the state. Projections this year are North Dakota insurance taxes will amount to over \$50,000,000. Wow!

Shopping Insurance: Western Agency, Inc. is an Independent Insurance Agency. Why are we an Independent Insurance Agency? Because no one company is all things to all people. In other words, no one company will be the best on all of your insurance all of the time. Captive agents, such as the "good hands" people, the "good neighbors," the "gecko" lovers, to name a few only are able to represent one major company. Independent Agents however, represent many carriers. There are several advantages to this. First of all we are able to survey the market for you to pick a carrier who will do the best job on your account. Secondly, if the carrier we have your policy placed with gets too expensive we are able to move you to another carrier without you needing to go on a search for another agent. We survey your account and the company it is placed with once per year to be sure we are not only correctly covering you against loss but that we are competitive on the cost of your policy as well.

New Pictures Brighten Up Office

In an effort to update and improve the appearance of our place of business, the offices of Western Agency, Inc. are taking on a new look due to many new pictures on the walls. We have pictures from award winning photographer Kandi Mikkelson, pictures of the Glenburn Elevator fire, and many framed newspaper articles featuring our clients. Several of our insureds who have been in the news this year have been: Farmer Larry Widdel who was featured in a newspaper article on raising soybeans, 10 North Main the new restaurant in Minot, and the article on the huge wind that passed over Lake Metigoshe causing much damage to many of our clients. In addition to the many newspaper articles we have many other photos of North Dakota scenes and events. If you are in the area stop in for a cup of our famous Kona Coffee and look around.