

Super Spring Issue

Be sure you read this issue

Editorial

Western Agency, Inc has grown to be the largest locally owned agency in central North Dakota. Although we insure hundreds of farms and do a large amount of contractor insurance, we also insure hundreds of homes, thousands of autos, as well as many churches, businesses and municipalities. I really think the reason we have grown from a few clients in 1976 to the thousands we have now is that we have always tried to sell coverage not price. The reason for this is that when claims happen we have always been able to be there for our clients. Insurance is really nothing more than a contract between you and an insurance company. Furthermore, the basic contract is drawn by attorneys; for the insurance company. It is up to your agent to customize the contract to correctly protect you in the event of a loss. You can bet if your agent does not draw the contract correctly by putting in the correct supplemental endorsements, and coverage extensions, chances are you will not be adequately paid in the event of a loss. Never make the mistake of thinking all insurance contracts and all agents are the same.

Every so often something will happen here around the agency that really brings this fact home. A few months ago one of these things came up. We lost a farm auto account to another agent. This very seldom happens and I really looked into why and how it happened. After doing a claims run on the account I found the insured had recorded six claims in the past two years and the competing agent who wrote the account failed to mention these losses when he wrote the replacement policy. This agent knew about these losses but conveniently forgot to tell the company about them. Furthermore, this insured had young drivers that were soon to be put on the policy. Of course the competing agent was cheaper on his premium. Leaving the claim information out would lower the price. However, there is a huge problem with writing insurance this way. I will guarantee you one thing. When and if you ever have a large loss, and with young drivers this is a very real possibility, your insurance carrier will do a very thorough investigation. At this time if it is found that someone lied on the application there is a very good possibility that the company will not provide coverage. Many times, the only way the client will be able to collect in this situation is to sue the agent under his malpractice insurance: if he has any. In addition, it is very possible that even then there will be no coverage if the malpractice company can prove the agent lied. No matter what, it leaves you the client, in a very bad situation. All of a sudden price is the last of your concerns. Remember, whatever the price, it will always be too much. You didn't buy insurance because it was so cheap; you bought insurance to protect your assets.

By talking about coverage verses price like this I don't mean to imply we are more expensive than other agents; we are not. We didn't get to be the size we are by being too expensive. The point I want to make is that it is possible that the agent trying to woo you to his company could very well be misrepresenting your contract to a company and if you ever really need him he will not be there. We will.

Western Agency, Inc., has been in business for 25 years. We carry millions of dollars of malpractice insurance just in case we ever make a mistake on a contract. We have never had a claim on our malpractice insurance policy. I suppose some day we will but we make every effort; every day; to make sure we do not.

Our overall goal has never changed. That is to provide the best coverage to you our clients at the best price possible: 25 hours per day.

Thanks for your business.

Chuck Tompkins, President, Western Agency, Inc.

Truck News

Trucks Last for Solberg: Roger Solberg drives many miles in his work. So many in fact that he now has 397,000 miles on his 1993 Dodge Dakota pickup. Solberg reports the truck is on its second motor and second transmission. He reports very few problems with the truck and intends to keep on driving it for years.

Semi Sales: In conversation with Brad Lambert at Westlie Motor Truck in Minot, Lambert says he is selling more Semi Tractors to farmers than any other group of people. Lambert says that farmers are able to purchase tractors with miles on them at substantial discounts and make them work for farm use, since in most cases the farm use does not mean driving many of miles.

Farm Truck Insurance: Although we are seeing some rate increases in virtually all lines of insurance. Farm truck rates have remained low and should continue to be a bargain. Losses on farm trucks have traditionally been very low and that should help keep the costs down.

Farm Insurance Corner

Joint Ownership of Farm Equipment: If you and a neighbor have purchased a piece of farm equipment together be sure that your agent knows what is going on. In many cases there may be two agents. Lets say agent one has ½ the value and agent two has the other ½. Most likely this will work if both companies know what is being done. Another way to do it would be for one of the farmers to insure the entire value of the equipment and the second farmer could be named as an additional insured on the first farmer's policy. Regardless of how the contract is set up it is a fairly simple thing to do. The big issue is it be done correctly and that the companies know what is going on. If you have any questions about this coverage please give us a call and we can get it clarified. The time to be sure is before a claim happens not after.

Custom Spraying: Even if it is a few acres: If you are going to do spraying for hire please call your agent first. This is a specialized activity and it is almost certain that you will need to endorse your policy to cover the exposure. We see large losses come of this type of activity and to be correctly covered takes some doing and usually involves extra premium. It is one of those things where to pick a few dollars you may end up spending a bunch. Give us a call before you get on the wrong end of one of these deals.

Borrowed, Rented, or New Equipment: Every year I talk about it; every year somebody forgets it. If you borrow, rent, or purchase new equipment; give us a call. I don't care who the company is or what anyone tells you: Nobody will cover all of these deals all the time. Many times they will; but what if your case is one where they won't: Call us.

Longest Term Western Agency, Inc. Customer Sought

Western Agency, Inc., was incorporated 12/15/76. We were thinking that we should try to find out who was our longest term insured. If you can remember how long you have been insured with Western Agency, Inc. please call and let Marlen know. Prizes for the top five will be \$100 - 1st, \$75 - 2nd, \$50 - 3rd, \$40 - 4th and \$30 - 5th. All prizes will be gift certificates to T-Bones; Minot's newest supper club. If you are a long time insured at Western Agency, Inc. give us a call you may be the winner.

Crop Insurance Corner

By and large it is looking like a 'normal' spring in our territory. Farmers are in the fields and the crop is well on its way to being planted. Policies and maps have been mailed out to area farmers and reports are that the new mapping system used by Western Agency, Inc. for their Multi-Peril Crop Insureds is working very well. Farmers can record acres on these maps as they are seeding the crop to better keep track of seeded acres. This will simplify the acreage reporting process as well as the proven yield recording required on Crop Insurance. Furthermore, if a claim is filed we will be able to use the maps to settle the loss sooner. If any farmers have a question on the policies and maps please give us a call and we can get all questions answered as soon as possible. In addition, acreage reports will be taken as soon as farmers are done seeding. Farmers are urged to give us a call as soon as they are done seeding and we can get out to take your acreage report ahead of the rush.

Western Agency, Inc. Scholarships Announced

Every year Western Agency, Inc. awards scholarships in many area schools. This years winners are: Surrey School, Amanda Brunner, Sawyer School, Lacy Collins and Jason Whitted, Granville School, Erin Hatlestad and Toniel Smith, Glenburn School, Brock Simonson, Bishop Ryan, Wendy Alex, Berthold School, Ryan Fegley and April Neshem, Garrison School, Derek Zerface, and Velva School, Loren Loftesnes. Total Scholarships awarded amounted to \$3800. We would like to wish all the graduating seniors good luck in the years ahead. It is our hope that by giving these scholarships we can help more of our states young people find careers, which will help them stay in our state.

Insurance News

Hanson Retires: Longtime CEO and President of North Star Mutual, Cliff Hanson has retired this past month. Hanson, who started working at North Star while still in high school was instrumental in moving the company from a very small local company to the regional powerhouse it now is. North Star is the largest farm insurance insurer in Minnesota and is the largest farm insurance writer in North Dakota representing the Independent Agency System. North Star insures more farms than any other carrier at Western Agency, Inc. and we are also the largest agent in the state for North Star. Cliff is truly a giant in the farm insurance industry and his work will not be forgotten. Also, true to his thorough nature Cliff has spent years putting in place a new management team, which will see to a seamless transition to new company leadership. This writer considers it an honor to represent North Star and to have worked with and be a friend of Cliff's.

Curtiss To Help Chaperone European Trip

Western Agency, Inc. Bookkeeper Gene Curtiss will again be going to London in 2002. The trip slated to leave in August of 2002 and lasting nine days will be mostly composed of high school seniors and college students. Cost of the trip will be around \$2000 and will include meals and lodging. If you or anyone you know would be interested in going on this trip call Gene Curtiss at the Western Agency, Inc. office and he can give you the details.

Living With Direct Bill

Direct Billing by computer is here to stay. Of course this is more efficient and makes more sense to companies. However, as all of us know computer billing is not yet easily understandable to those of us who are not a computer genius. Many times it is not easy to understand the amount that is due or even what it is for. The solution is to give us a call here at the office and we can quickly figure out what the bill is and get you back on track. We urge our clients to be sure and call us so we can quickly get these questions handled

because if the billing doesn't get in promptly the computer will cancel the policy. Even if you may have a refund coming at a later date the computer will not know it and still will cancel the policy. The only way to avoid this is to just give us a call so we can get these billing questions answered as soon as they come up. If it is after office hours give us a call at home so we can get your question answered. Along this same line is the availability now of **Direct Deposit Direct Bill**. This type of billing can be deducted direct from your checking account if you so desire. Many people like this option and if it interests you give us a call and we can set it up for you. Direct billing in all of its forms will not go away. Since all companies are using it we want to help make it as painless as possible for you. Give us a call.

Western Agency, Inc. Starts Advisory Council

Over the years Western Agency, Inc., President Chuck Tompkins has served on many company advisory councils. Most recently Tompkins was honored for having been on the Dakota Fire/ EMC Companies advisory council for the past three years. Advisory councils were started to let agents tell companies how to better deliver the insurance product to consumers. Along this line of thinking we have been thinking that it would be a very good idea to have a Western Agency, Inc. advisory council made up of several of our insureds. The purpose of a council such as this is three fold. First: If we as an agency are doing things that do not please the client we should take steps to correct it. Second: If a certain company is doing things that are not what the client wants; maybe we as an agency can call the company on it and see if we can get it changed. Third: If the client can tell us of a better way to do something all clients and the agency benefit. Accordingly we will be contacting several of our insureds to see if they would be interested in spending half a day at the office to help us see how we could better serve our clients. This half-day session will end with a supper at T-Bones for those who agree to help us by serving on the council. In addition, if you as an insured wish to be on this council please let us know. Usually, a group of 10 people make up a good council and if we already have 10 for this year we can put your name on the list to be on the next council scheduled.

College Bound

If you have children who will be going to college this fall be sure and have a talk with your insurance agent before they go. Although your policy may provide some limited coverage for student's personal property while they are away at school, in most cases it is a good idea for the student to purchase a renters type policy. These policies are very low cost and provide far better coverage than the automatic coverage extended off the parent's homeowners policy. In addition, coverage for computers and other high value items should be carefully looked at. While we are on the subject of students away at school. It is a very good idea to not let anyone else use your car, and also not to drive someone else's car. Remember, if someone is driving your car and is involved in an accident it is the same as if you were involved in the accident. We strongly advise not to let others drive your car. If you have any questions on this be sure and call us and get it clarified. These can be very important issues and to be sure your agent has you correctly covered he needs to know what you and your children are doing.

Haskins Inducted Into Horseshoe Hall of Fame

Long time Western Agency, Inc.; insured Lou Haskins was inducted into the North Dakota Horseshoe Hall of Fame this past year. Haskins, who has been a standout Horseshoe Player for many years, has also been the State Champion six out of the last seven years. Haskins feels Horseshoe is a very healthy and fun game that can be played by young and old. He is happy that this game is seeing a comeback in recent years and is looking forward to many more years of playing.

Summer Insurance Issues

Jet ski Coverage: In recent years many people have purchased personal watercraft. If you are one of these people be sure and check to see if the machine is correctly covered on your insurance policy. There have been many claims on these machines and it is very important that you have the correct coverage placed before a loss. Many times the loss will be when someone new takes the personal watercraft for a trial drive and forgets how to stop it. These claims can be costly and severe: Give your agent a call just to be sure he has you correctly covered.

New Buildings and Home Improvements: If you are adding to your home, or upgrading the value significantly by home improvements; or if you are building a new garage, barn, or equipment storage building: Call your insurance agent. Many times these additions and even new buildings are not insured adequately or maybe not at all. Most of us assume the contractor is responsible for the building until it is completed. Again, this is not always true. Furthermore, a new building is far more vulnerable while under construction. Rule of thumb: If you or a contractor decide to do some work around the farm or home, be safe; give your agent a call to see where your coverage stands.

New Business Contest Announced

Western Agency, Inc. has always used non-traditional ways to advertise. We have spent our advertising dollars on scholarships, after prom parties, after graduation parties, school fundraisers, local rodeos, aerial photos, and many other unusual methods. I have always thought that by spending our advertising dollars this way the money or gift goes direct to our clients instead to some radio or TV station. However, make no mistake about it we certainly want to write new business and over the years the best source of new business has been the new clients our existing clients send us. Along this line we are looking for ways that our existing clients can help us write more business. What I was thinking is that if you as one of our existing insureds will give us the name of a friend who we could insure; and if we write the account, we will put your name in the hat for a drawing for a weeklong trip to Hawaii. This trip will include airfare for two and use of a condo for one week. The condo is a two bedroom with two baths so if you wish you could take several people. Contest will run for the balance of 2001 and the trip can be scheduled anytime from April to November of 2002. The way you enter is either give us the name of a person we can call to insure or have them call us and be sure they tell us who sent them. I am thinking that probably only 100 of our many insureds will take advantage of this contest so the odds are very good you could be the one to win the trip. Good luck !!!!