

INSURANCE Roundup

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408 - 20th Ave. SW • Suite 101
Minot, North Dakota 58701

Certificates of Insurance

In this day and age of out-sourcing many of the tasks on a farm or business it is a very good idea to get a Certificate of Insurance from the person who is going to do work for you BEFORE they do the job. A good case in point and what brings this up is if you have a commercial sprayer spray your crops. If they damage your neighbors crop and are not insured you may be held liable. Furthermore, it is a gray area as to whether or not your policy will respond to pay for something you hired someone else to do. Many policies have different language on this so be sure and call us if you have any questions. Also, we can help you get a Certificate of Insurance from the contractors insurance agent if you so wish. The bottom line is let us help you determine if coverage is in force before there is a problem. We are happy to do this; it costs you nothing, and well may prevent you from having a major uninsured loss.

Western Agency, Inc. Purchases Christianson Agency in Bottineau

Western Agency, Inc. has purchased the Christianson Agency of Bottineau from Jim Christianson 11/1/03. Agency owner Jim Christianson will remain as agent, but since he and secretary Donna Sebilus are so busy much of the year with the tax business, we are in the process of hiring a full time agent in Bottineau to expand the operations of the agency. Due to the availability of the many markets of Western Agency, Inc., we feel the Christianson Agency's book of business will see excellent growth. Jim Christianson will maintain his HR Block tax business and will be assisted in the insurance sales by staff from Western's Minot office. Western Agency, Inc. president Chuck Tompkins stated, "We are really excited about the move to Bottineau." "We were writing quite a bit of business in the Bottineau area anyway and now by merging Jim's book of business we should be able to become a far bigger force in Commercial and Farm insurance in the Bottineau area." With the purchase of the Christianson Agency, Western Agency, Inc. will now be writing over 850 farms in North Dakota making them by far the largest farm insurance independent agency in the state.



Homeowners Insurance Changes Discussed

Periodically over the years companies will change or clarify coverages on insurance policies and this has recently been done on Homeowners insurance with some companies. We have been operating for years with the Homeowners 91 policy and now many companies have adopted the Homeowners 2000. Overall, changes in this new format are not too great but a few do need clarification.

1. One of the points to be looked at is when a student is away at college. The new policy states that to be insured the student must be a full time student under the age of 24. It is just a good idea to call us and we can check with the company we have you insured with to be sure all is well with the insurance coverage for your children away from home. I still think the best way to cover kids away at school is to write a separate policy for them. Then there is no question they are covered.
2. Water damage from backup of sewage has been clarified to the extent that the only way to have a claim of this nature insured is to have a special endorsement added to your policy. This has been the way we have always tried to have you covered anyway so this should be no surprise to our clients. However, again, if you have any questions give us a call so we can tell you where the company where you have your policy stands on the issue.
3. Vehicles used to service the residence, such as lawn mowers have had coverage changed. Some companies may not provide coverage if you are for instance mowing your neighbor's yard. This can be a biggie so if you are doing something of this sort let us know.
4. Business use liability coverage for children under the age of 21 has actually been increased for those of you who have children babysitting or mowing grass. However, again, give us a call and talk to us about it. We want to be sure the coverage is adequate for what is being done.

My point in mentioning these items is not to alarm anyone. I just want to alert you to call us when you or your children are doing something which may not be covered automatically under your homeowner's policy. It costs you nothing to give us a call and we are happy to talk about the situation and tell you where your coverage stands on an issue. Remember, the best way to be sure a loss will be covered is to talk about it before the loss happens to be sure adequate coverage is in place.

Westy Hat Contest

The Wear Your Westy Hat Contest is getting out of hand. This issue we have three \$50



Perkins gift certificate winners and one \$25 consolation prize winner. In addition we have company people from as far away as Sheboygan, Wisconsin requesting Westy hats. First of all Western insured Rob Dick donated his Westy hat to a worthy cause. This would have been no problem except a few days later he happened to be having lunch with one of our "secret" judges. Of course Rob had no way of knowing this but of course since he had given his hat away, he was without his Westy hat. In recognition of his charitable act he is one of this issue's winners. Our "secret" judge was also informed that another Western insured, Mike English, carries a Westy hat in his car on the outside chance he may see the "secret" judge. It was felt by the judging committee that just having Westy hat and not wearing it does not qualify as a winner. However, in recognition of Mike's trying to be prepared he will get a consolation prize of a \$25 gift certificate to Perkins. Other first place winners are Arlo Borud, of Stanley who actually wore his Westy hat to John Deere Days and Les Mau who had his picture taken wearing his Westy hat on vacation. In addition, we have had requests from Harry Anderson of North Star Insurance Company and Eric Swenson from Acuity Insurance Company for hats on the outside chance they too may see the "secret" judge while wearing their Westy hat. Congratulations to all winners and thanks again to all of you for wearing your Westy hat. If you know anyone who should be in the running for the Wear Your Westy Hat contest be sure and call us to let us know.



Western Agency, Inc.

Insurance Shorts:

Credit Reports: They help you get better insurance rates; they help you at the bank. Even employers and landlords are starting to use them. Make sure yours is as good as it can be. The higher your score the better it is for you. Some ways to improve your score would include having fewer credit lines, such as credit cards, charge accounts, and loans. In addition, having a good history of paying bills on time is a big help. Many of your bills can be put on EFT (electronic funds transfer) with little problem. It is easy and you can even put insurance on EFT. If you want us to help you do this give us a call. We would be happy to help. You can get a copy of your credit report and information on how to improve it by calling Equifax at 1-800-829-3616. Or you can write them at Equifax Consumer Services Inc., P.O. Box 105496, Atlanta, GA 30348.

Refrigerator Hauling: Ever haul a refrigerator in the back of your pickup? If you do BE SURE and tie it securely. What could happen to a heavy refrigerator? They blow out. Don't ask me why, apparently somehow the wind sucks them out but over the years you wouldn't believe how many we have had that blew out of the back of pickups. Better solution? Call Lyle's Moving in Minot 852-5269.

Door Blows Off a Behlen Machine Shed: Winds in the Lansford area must have been huge this past summer as they were strong enough to blow the doors off a Behlen curvet farm building owned by Loren Guidinger, RR Lansford. Western Agency, Inc has literally hundreds of these buildings insured and virtually never records a loss on a Behlen curvet so that must have been some wind. We're glad the house is still there.

Scholarships: We are currently doing scholarships in seven towns around North Dakota. If you have a student that is going off to college next fall be sure and see if we have a program in your town so they can submit an application. If we don't have a program in your town talk to Kelly or myself and we will see about getting one set up. These scholarships are around \$500 and can be a real help in purchasing books or other needed college supplies.

Recipe Corner: Gene Reiling's French Toast: 4 egg whites, 3 egg yolks, splash of milk, sprinkle of cinnamon, vanilla to taste, 2 tablespoons honey (heat honey till very liquid) mix all in blender till well blended. Use firm sourdough bread, dunk in batter, fry in canola oil till browned. Serve with butter and maple syrup.

"No Accident" Kid In Your Household?

In a conversation with one of my insureds the other day I made the statement that when people add their children to their auto policy it is kind of a standard joke in the insurance business that it is not IF the kid will have a claim but WHEN and how much it will cost. Also, virtually all parents will say something such as "Johnny has taken drivers training and will be a super safe driver." I think all parents say this to themselves and others to try and reassure themselves that this will in fact be the case.



The reason I think this is so is because when my own kids started driving I was saying the same things, even when I knew it would probably not be the case: Of course both got in accidents virtually immediately. At least they didn't make me wait too long. However, to get back to my story, this insured pointed out to me that his child had not gotten in any accidents and was in fact at age 25 without any. Wow! Therefore, if you have any children who have achieved this age without any accidents please let me know. I feel an award is in order.

Employee Contest

It looks like the send an employee to Hawaii contest has a hands-down winner in Craig Johnson. Johnson, the Farm Insurance Manager at Western Agency, Inc. was top vote getter in the contest which ended this past year. Although Craig received many votes the ballots of Pat Walsh, Jeana Walsh, Jerome Walsh, Mary Walsh, and Jim Walsh came in the form of a Thank You card with a note on it. The card had a big "We Vote Craig" salutation written across it and helped put Johnson over the top for the win. Craig and his wife Rhonda will be going to Hawaii in the next year and would like to thank all who took the time to send in a ballot.

Editorial...

As I sit down to write this editorial it seems that things have finally settled down a bit in our industry. Probably due to the stock market stabilizing we are not seeing as much wild activity in insurance rates and some have even started to moderate a bit. Some new things such as Credit Rating Underwriting have come up but we each have had to deal with our Credit Ratings for many years whenever we did any banking anyway, so that is really not too new of a deal either is it? What is new about Credit Ratings is that more people, such as landlords, insurance companies, and employers are using Credit Reports. Because of this a person should be concerned with having the best Credit Rating that they are able to have. It is possible to materially improve your rating by making sure it is correct. I want my staff to help you any way we can in this regard and that is why I have been putting out quite a bit of information on credit ratings. If you have any questions on it please give us a call.

Of course in these past few years with insurance rates going up we have seen lots of people checking to see about ways to lower their insurance costs. In most cases we have been able to do this by dropping unneeded coverage, raising deductibles, or in some cases, moving the account to another company. In this process of trying to keep rates down we have lost a couple of accounts to other agents. However, since Western Agency, Inc. has grown 28% this year and has a client retention ratio of 94% we certainly

have not lost too many accounts, we are happy to say. One thing I have noticed is in many cases where we have lost a client to another agent their insurance coverage has been placed with a far inferior company, and again in many cases with a policy with far worse coverage than the one they had with us. This really disturbs me as these clients are now operating with not only a weaker company, but with a poor insurance contract. Yet, I am sure these clients were told that "everything was the same" when they switched to these other agents. I guess my only purpose in

bringing this up is to caution you that here at Western Agency, Inc. we consider your insurance business a personal trust you have given us to take care of for you. It would be our nightmare to see you have a claim that was not covered, due to us selling you a poor product with a poor company. Not only that but to be doubly sure your assets are protected, similar to your doctor, we carry malpractice insurance. Due to the cost of malpractice insurance many other agents don't even carry it. Yet, if your assets are compromised due to a poor company or poor policy do these "cheaper" agents have the necessary money to protect you and yours? I don't think so.

Western Agency, Inc. continues to

grow. We now have offices in eight different towns and with the acquisition of the Christianson Agency we are insuring over 850 farms around the state. We have a culture of writing the best possible policies for our clients and when losses come we are there with you, and the adjustor to be sure your assets are correctly protected. We do not feel our job is done when we sell you a policy. We feel our job is to be there when you need us and be sure you are adequately compensated for your loss. Although most times we will be the cheapest this will not always be the case and it is not our #1 goal. Our #1 goal is now, always has been, and always will be to "Protect your assets."

As always, thanks for your business.



Chuck Tompkins