

Insurance career possibilities becoming more visible

HOW MANY times have you heard one of your industry colleagues say: 'I kinda fell into the insurance business by accident'?

It seems almost everyone either followed in their parents' footsteps or stumbled on the insurance industry while pursuing a different path.

But that could be changing.

"I feel that the public opinion of insurance is changing which in turn could make the career possibilities in the insurance industry more visible to the average person," said Jody Willigar, one of several Insurance Institute graduates contacted by *Thompson's* to explore what attracts people to the p&c industry.

"I believe that the Insurance Bureau of Canada, Insurance Institute and other insurance industry bodies are doing a better job at promoting the benefits of the insurance industry as well as showing it as a viable career path."

Now a claims adjuster with Intact Insurance in Halifax, Mr. Willigar has a background in psychology and education.

In fact, he was half-way around the world when he first considered working in the insurance industry — teaching elementary school in South Korea.

Before returning to his native Moncton in 2009, Mr. Willigar befriended another Canadian expatriate who eventually told him about a position at Intact.

"Getting into the insurance industry was by chance. It has been a great experience for me and one that I would have no problem recommending to a friend."

Mr. Willigar suggested that a career in the insurance business has become further legitimized by employers' and regulators' education requirements and designations.

Courses and designations like the Chartered Insurance Professional have brought to light the fact that those involved in the industry are professionals in their field, he said.

Since 1998 over 17,000 people have graduated from the Insurance Institute's CIP and Fellow Chartered Insurance Professional programs.

"I think that completing my CIP early in my career has benefitted me in that it has shown me as an individual who puts a high emphasis on education and on bettering myself."

Adrian Osti is another institute graduate, who believes more people are choosing a career in the insurance business for a variety of reasons.

"I think the gap between baby boomers and generation y has led to more recruiting through universities and colleges," said Mr. Osti, learning and development manager for Northbridge Insurance in Toronto.

"Schools are also creating new programs specifically designed for the insurance industry, such as the (Wilfrid) Laurier University certificate in risk management.

"Insurance is also an industry that has remained fairly stable. Recruitment has actually increased — despite the degree of economic turbulence since 2008."

He said the industry has more work to do in promoting education designations.

"I find that people aren't usually aware of designations such as the CIP, unless they already work in the industry."

Mr. Osti, who now has his CIP, FCIP and Canadian Risk Management designations, majored in finance in university and actually had considered insurance before graduating.

"The CIP designation has definitely benefited me in my career," he said noting it led him to teach courses."

Vikki Hedderson is another CIP graduate who said she fell into the industry by accident.

"I had not even thought of insurance until I was looking for my second co-op placement and was accepted by Optimum Insurance (back then it was Optimum Frontier Insurance)," said the commercial underwriter who started with the company in accounting after earning a diploma in North Bay, Ont.

She said insurance seems to be more prominent as a career choice

than ever before thanks to TV ads and job fairs at high schools, colleges and universities.

"While not everyone I talk with can appreciate insurance the way I do, I have the opportunity to share with them the actual purpose and benefits of insurance.

"However, I think there is still much to be done to share with the next generation all the opportunities the insurance industry has for them."

Ms. Hedderson said she was encouraged to seek a CIP designation after being transferred to the commercial department and she never looked back.

"It seemed that every time I learned something new, the same topic would come up at work," she said.

CIP graduate and Canadian Accredited Insurance Broker Matt Robblee is another who said his joining the industry "was a bit of a fluke."

He ended up applying for a position in 2004 at Caldwell-Roach Insurance in Truro, N.S. through a former Boy Scouts of Canada leader.

The job was in the processing department but the brokerage found Mr. Robblee more suited for an account executive role and he's been with them ever since.

"I can honestly say that I have not thought twice about my decision to accept and I've worked hard and been focused on making the most of every possible opportunity the position and industry has presented."

He said he's seen an increase in university graduates and young professionals gravitating to the industry.

"I think that on the company side human resources departments deserve a lot of credit for making the industry known to recent or soon-to-be university grads.

"It's not surprising. Given the aging workforce they've been forced to recruit and train more than ever."

And on the broker side, Mr. Robblee said their local association (Insurance Brokers Association of Nova Scotia) and Young Broker Network has been working to do the same.

"That being said, while more are considering a career in insurance, the industry still has a way of making 'lifers' out of people like me who fall onto the opportunity." ■

Van Bakel named Crawford ceo

CRAWFORD & Company (Canada) has promoted 20-year employee Pat Van Bakel as successor to ceo John Sharoun, who has moved on to become the U.S.-based firm's chief executive of specialty markets for the Americas.

Mr. Van Bakel has served as chief operating officer for Crawford in Canada since 2012 and prior to that he was senior vp, operations, insurer markets.

He has his Chartered Insurance Professional designation and is currently a member of the governing council of the Insurance Institute of Ontario and is also its incoming deputy president.

Mr. Van Bakel is a member of many industry organizations and currently chairs and serves

on several institute committees.

"Pat has been an essential member of our senior executive team for many years as he has moved steadily up through several key roles in the company," Crawford (Americas) ceo Kevin B. Frawley said, noting the move was part of a succession plan under Mr. Sharoun's leadership that has been ongoing for a few years.

Meanwhile, Mr. Sharoun will continue to be based in Toronto and will remain on the Canadian board of directors. The specialty markets division he will be leading focuses on serving the Lloyd's of London and international adjusting markets in the energy, marine, aviation, forensic accounting and mining sectors.