

# Family, Friends & Community

## How New PIA President Jason Zattler Launched His P/C Agency Career

Jason Ray Zattler grew up in the printing business. His father, Rick, owns Turtle Mac & Key Printing shop in Maple Plain. His uncle, Tom, runs a similar operation in St. Louis Park by the name of Great River Printing. Zattler worked in his father's print shop while attending Mound Westonka High School.

But shortly after graduation in 1994, Rick sat his son down for some straight talk. The personal computer was making it much easier for people to do more of their own printing, the elder Zattler informed his son, a trend that was transforming the business. That meant, he counseled, there was no room economically for Jason in the family business.

So, the younger Zattler looked outward.

Relying on his extensive print experience, he quickly found a job working nights at a downtown Minneapolis bindery owned by American Express Financial Advisors. During the day he worked at another printing shop. His explanation for the dual effort: he was ambitious. That ambition soon caused him to explore other opportunities within the company. He availed himself of the vast internal training system with an eye toward moving into the company's financial planning offices at its iconic tower on 8th Street. Zattler eventually became certified in several areas, enabling him to help the planners manage their clients' life, annuities, trusts and other financial products.

After seven years, Zattler again began to look for more opportunities. He found one at another large company, Allianz Life in Golden Valley, which he joined in 2002. The position involved supporting sales representatives who were providing stop-loss coverage to large employers self insuring for health care. The job provided a front-row seat for large-money transactions. It also provided insight into how Allianz's sales professionals conducted themselves at high-level meetings. He liked the work and saw a future for himself at the company. But in 2006 Allianz Life's health division was sold to Houston-based HCC Life, which eventually phased out the stop-loss health business—and Zattler's job.

Almost immediately, however, he received a phone call from Jim Kelso of BCS Insurance Company, a Chicago-based company that was owned by all 39 Blue Cross Blue Shield Plans. The company provided a variety of products such as limited medical insurance and college student accident insurance, as well as medical stop loss and travel insurance.

Kelso had heard from his counterpart at Allianz that Zattler was available and that the ambitious 30-year-old was also friendly and personable—which combined with his substantial product knowledge—would make him a good candidate for the sales rep spot Kelso was trying to fill.

Zattler accepted the offer in 2007 and was soon providing BCS products to brokerage companies nationwide. It was another job he very much enjoyed. However, the extensive travel was increasingly challenging. It became even more so in 2010 when he and wife Suzanne added son Samuel to the family, joining his five-year-old brother Dominic John.

Zattler then again began looking for alternative employment. But that search changed in a way he did not anticipate. In 2011, BCS hired a new CEO who began a reorganization that had Zattler scheduled to relocate to Chicago, a city in which he and Suzanne had no interest. To gain time, he asked if he could think about the move for a few months.

As he pondered the options, Zattler stopped by the Wiser Insurance Agency in Mound to pay his auto and homeowner's pre-

mium. His agent, the late Patty Guttormson, casually asked him: "what's new?" When Zattler responded that he likely was about to start looking for a job, things began to happen. Agency owners Jim Robinette and Jack Diesing quickly realized Zattler, who had his P/C, L&H, LTC licenses, would be a good fit for their growing agency. They hired him.



Jason Zattler thought printing would be his career, but the popularity of computers intervened.

As a commission-only agent, however, with no existing clients it was a struggle. Fortunately, Suzanne—a quality engineer with Lifecore Biomedical in Chaska—was in a position to significantly contribute to the family finances. Equally fortunate was the presence of friends, relatives and acquaintances from a lifetime in the area who supported him by purchasing insurance whenever they could. They also referred prospects to him.

The new agent also began networking. He joined the Mound Area Community & Commerce and the Business Network International, which he served as the local chapter president. He became a member of the Northwest Tonka Lions Club, where he also became president; and the board for Spirit of the Lake Festival for City of Mound.

After three comparative lean years, the involvement strategy paid off. Zattler has since become a co-owner of the agency with Robinette and Steve Kvam, who replaced the retired Diesing. The three recently purchased the building in which their agency is located at 2345 Commerce Blvd in Mound. Zattler advises aspiring agents, as he once was, to adopt a positive attitude and cultivate a "passionate desire to be kind and—most importantly—make a difference in other people's lives" as a formula to success.

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There was another important association he joined: the Minnesota Professional Insurance Agents, an organization he now serves as president. He is approaching that role with the same ambition he tackled those two simultaneous printing jobs 20 years earlier.

On his agenda is a goal of developing ways to add extra value for members beyond traditional education and legislative advocacy benefits. Perhaps his most ambitious aim is to find a way that carriers can pool resources to create training programs that keep new talent flowing into the business.

Another idea is space on the association's website (www.piamn.com) where those looking to buy or sell agencies can connect, as well as enable people seeking employment to post resumes—perhaps leading to insurance careers a bit more directly than Zattler found his. ■

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A casual 'what's new?' question led to his new career at the Wiser Agency in Mound.