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PIA can help you
and your agency succeed

Let some longtime YIP and PIA members tell you how

Have you ever wondered if you are taking advantage of all the resources PIA offers you to help your agency succeed? Sure, you may have attended the conferences, conventions and continuing-education classes; you may have utilized the tool kits and resources in PIA's Industry Resource Center (e.g., Agency Marketing Tool Kit, Agency Staffing Assistance Program, Business Operations Tool Kit and Steps to Success); and you may have developed a marketing campaign with PIA Creative Services. But, have you considered how an active role in your association might help your agency? PIA asked some members who started in its Young Insurance Professionals affiliates and/or worked their way through the ranks of the PIA boards to get their insight on how this benefited them.



Name: Jason Bartow

Agency: Eugene A. Bartow Insurance Agency, Deer Park, N.Y.

Date of membership: 2005

Titles, positions or honors: All officer positions for NY-YIP, culminating with president in 2015-16; YIP liaison to Company/Agent Relations Committee; YIP liaison to PIANYPAC; Awards: *NY-YIP of the Year* (2013).

How has the organization(s) evolved over the years?

Bartow: NY-YIP used to focus on networking events, which are an important aspect of our business. In recent years, we added a professional development component. We've built liaison positions between NY-YIP and PIANY, so that up-and-coming YIP leaders have access to PIA. Now, there is a real partnership between the two organi-

zations. We've also become more active in PIANY events (e.g., PIANY District Office Visits; Regional Awareness Programs; and the Federal Legislative Summit).

Campion Renna: The mission of NJYIP and PIANJ is to educate and serve the independent insurance agency community and to help agents succeed in their businesses. The dedication and commitment of PIA staff and volunteers is unsurpassed. We have the support of more than 70 staff members in Albany, N.Y., who provide everything from education to HR resources to E&O advice. The PIA volunteer committees, board of directors and executive board, who give countless hours serving the membership, are laser-focused on the challenges to the professional, independent agent. As insurance distribution competition evolves, so does PIA's support and programs.

Krause: Of course, at one point the CTYIP didn't even exist, but PIACT recognized the need to get the younger people involved in the industry. Also, PIA has grown over the years to keep up with technology. Each year, it enhances its resources and what is provided to members.

One tool that I find particularly helpful is Ask PIA. Through this resource, members can ask a question and one of PIA's qualified staff members responds via email. The Q&A is archived online and is available to all PIA members. I can't tell you how much Ask PIA has helped when I have a difficult coverage question.

Suydam: It's a natural transition for people to move from NJYIP to PIANJ. There is institutional memory that carries over from one organization to the next. I think PIANJ reflects the times. PIA is most engaged when the industry and the insurance-buying public needs it to be. I'm thinking of the 1980-90s when we met every month to discuss "take-all-comers." The adversity brought us together (with other agents and with our carriers). We got better because we were dealing with difficult times. Everyone got more proficient.

Tell us about your journey through YIP/PIA.

Bartow: I started coming to NY-YIP meetings after I attended PIANY's MetroRAP. I met some great people at the event. Since I worked in my family's agency, I was motivated to make business connections for myself, rather than rely on the contacts established by my father and my grandfather, and NY-YIP seemed like a great place to start. Once I was involved in NY-YIP, I became a board member and chaired its Membership Committee. About five years ago, I was tasked by then-President Gino A. Orrino, CPIA, to build a five-year vision plan. Today, I'm president of the organization and we are just about finished implementing the plan.

Campion Renna: I joined my family's agency right after college. Shortly thereafter, I became an active NJYIP member. Initially, I joined the organization to socialize with other young people in the industry. However, as my involvement deepened, I realized what a resource it was to be able to call on anyone in my growing network of professional colleagues who had turned into friends. We shared with

each other ideas about improving our sales skills to better understand technical and complicated insurance concepts and more.

Krause: My father, Kenneth A. Krause, CIC, served as the association's president in 1992-93, and he encouraged me to get involved with PIA. I was an association director and treasurer of PIACT in the early 2000s, and currently on the board, serving as president-elect. I have been a member of multiple committees (e.g., Association Programs, Education, Convention and Legislative) and was chair of the Convention and Associations Program committee. I was recognized as PIACT's *Committee Chair of the Year* twice; once for Convention Committee in 2002 and for the Association Programs Committee in 2016.

Suydam: It was serendipitous how I became the first president of NJYIP in 1987. I was on the PIANJ committee in charge of creating the New Jersey Young Insurance Professionals. We decided to draw straws to determine who would be on the first board. I drew the short straw, and it turned out to be beneficial to me because, later when I became active in PIANJ, I became the first female president of the association in 1992-93.

Vowteras: I got involved with NJYIP when I attended a networking event with my father (William G. Vowteras, CPCU, PIANJ president, 1986-87) in 1996. During that event, I met a lot of good people and established many great contacts. A few months later, I started attending YIP committee meetings. The following year, I was on the board and I became NJYIP president in 2001. At that point, I was on some PIA committees. After I became YIP president, I joined the PIANJ board and became president of PIANJ in 2009. I'm still very active in the association today, some 20 years later.

How did being a YIP prepare you for your career?

Bartow: It has led to carrier appointments for my agency; and given my agency access to MGAs and their programs. I think other industry professionals deal with me differ-



Name: Michael A. Krause, CIC
Agency: Anderson-Krause Insurance, Branford, Conn.
Date of membership: 1967
Titles, positions or honors: PIACT director, treasurer, vice president and president-elect; PIA committees: Association Programs (Member/Consumer Relations) (chair), Convention (chair), Legislative; Awards: *Committee Chair of the Year* (2002 and 2016).



Name: John C. Parsons II, CIC, CPIA, AAI
Agency: Parsons & Associates Inc., Syracuse, N.Y.
Date of membership: 1986
Titles, positions or honors: NY-YIP board of directors and committees member; PIANY treasurer, vice president, first vice president, president-elect and current PIANY president; PIANY board of directors member; PIA committees: Business Issues, Executive/Budget & Finance, Government Affairs, Membership; Syracuse Advisory Council; Awards: *NY-YIP of the Year* (1999).

ently because they know I'm the NY-YIP president. They understand that I am committed to the insurance industry and they take what I say about it at face value.

Sidle: NY-YIP helped me to establish career-long friendships and acquaintances, many of whom I now serve with and have served with in the past on the PIA board. It helped me to realize that while we are in a competitive arena, we can work together for the betterment of the insurance industry as a whole.

Suydam: It helped me recognize and hone my leadership skills. You need that in your own office. It helped me find information and be resourceful. As an agency principal, it gave me more confidence when working with clients or companies. I definitely became a better negotiator with companies. And, I had a deeper understanding of insurance regulations because when I was on NJYIP (or PIANJ) committees I helped mold the regulations.

Vowteras: I already was active in the insurance industry before I was on the YIP board, but this was the first organized board with which I was involved. Sitting down with



Name: Kacy Campion Renna, CIC
Agency: Connelly-Campion-Wright, Belmar, N.J.
Date of membership: 1987
Titles, positions or honors: All officer positions for PIANJ and current PIANJ president; PIANJ board of directors; NJYIP director; PIA committees: Business Issues, Executive/Budget & Finance; PIANJ's Women's Business Forum.



Name: J. Kyle Dougherty, CIC
Agency: Dougherty Insurance Agency Inc., Stratford, Conn.
Date of membership: 1993
Titles, positions or honors: All officer positions for CTYIP, culminating with president in 2002-03, director and board member of PIACT; PIA committees: Association Programs, Education, GNAC, Industry/Company Relations, Membership; Awards: *Director of the Year* (2001), *Distinguished Service* (2003), *Committee Chair of the Year* (2014), *Industry Awareness* (2016).

20 other people can be intimidating at first, but there was good structure. I got to see how meetings were run and how a good chair runs a meeting.

How did working with YIP help you with your leadership in PIA?

Dougherty: When I first started in CTYIP, the group I met was impressive. They all seemed to have different skills: One was energetic and enthusiastic. One was a technical and detail-oriented. One was charismatic. One seemed to know everyone and had high-up contacts in the industry. And, one was all business. Despite their differences, they were all outgoing, motivated, competitive and capable. They were *professional*. I looked up to them; and they became my mentors. To increase my involvement in YIP, I chaired the Membership Committee. My previous experience showed me what to do and I went in prepared, enthusiastic, energized and determined to help the committee succeed.

Parsons: NY-YIP offered me a great opportunity to learn from other members in a noncompetitive way. Serving on the YIP committee and later NY-YIP board, led me to the opportunity to serve on PIA committees as a liaison, which introduced me to people—from all over the industry—who had been in the industry longer than I had been. Being involved with the PIANY committees made it more valuable to be involved with the YIP committee/board and made it worth it to spend the time to go to Albany and be away from my home and work. It exposed me to how a board works and the dynamics involved, which has been helpful to me over the years and it has better prepared me for being on the PIA board. It also helped in business and the other organizations I became involved with over the years by allowing me to be a more valuable participant.

Vowteras: It gave me a good understanding of how to listen to different sides of the story. And, it taught me how to keep control of a meeting. It taught me how to draw my own conclusions and help other people come to a consensus. Each meeting had a business, yet casual feel and I meet people from all over the industry (e.g., agents, carriers and vendors), so it improved my network of contacts.

Name: Alan Plafker, CPIA

Agency: Garber Atlas Fries & Associates, Oceanside, N.Y.

Date of membership: 2000

Titles, positions or honors: All officer positions for PIANY, culminating with president in 2013-14; PIANY board of directors member; PIA committees: Company/Industry Relations, Executive/Budget & Finance, Government Affairs, Nominations, PIANYPAC Governing; New York City Advisory Council; Awards: *PIANY presidential citation* (2015).



Name: David L. Sidle II, CIC, CPIA

Agency: David L. Sidle Agency Inc., Watkins Glen, N.Y.

Date of membership: 1991

Titles, positions or honors: PIANY vice president (2009-10); PIANY board of directors member; PIA committees: Business Issues, Education & Conference; Southern Tier Advisory Council.



Is there anything you would do differently?

Krause: I wish that I participated more in the extra activities that PIACT and CTYIP offers members. While I attended meetings and education sessions, I could have been even more involved in the social aspect of both organizations. So, I am encouraging my daughter, Morgan, who joined the agency about three years ago, to get involved with all CTYIP has to offer: The business friendships I have developed over the years—at the meetings and education sessions—are invaluable. I feel that, if I attended more social events with them, I would have gotten even closer to them.

Parsons: I would have taken advantage of the opportunity to move to the PIA board from YIP earlier than I did. At the time I had young kids at home and

didn't think I would be able to dedicate the time needed. Having done it now—looking back I probably could have done it and benefited earlier.

What's the best advice you ever received about PIA?

Plafker: My dad was a board member and he held officer positions in PIANY from 1970s-1990s. I grew up in the industry and my son, Michael, who is a past president of NY-YIP and a director of PIANY, is carrying on our legacy of PIA participation. My dad stressed all that PIA offers agents from the development of relationships (e.g., carrier appointments); to recognition; to the chance to contribute to the insurance industry. I was told that being a part of PIANY would help me develop relationships with insurance producers throughout the state, which is true. But, one of the best pieces of advice I received was not to stay away from the association because I was concerned about meeting up with competitors: We are all friendly competitors.

Sidle: People who are thinking about getting involved in PIA should realize that it benefits you in ways that you might not even consider. The comradery alone is worth the price of admission. Aside from that: the education; the E&O products; PIA Creative Services; the ability to access markets; the



Name: Robin Suydam, CIC

Agency: Suydam Insurance Agency LLC, Somerset, N.J.

Date of membership: 1982

Titles, positions or honors: First president of NJYIP (1987); first woman president of PIANJ (1992-93); PIANJ board of directors; PIA committees: Budget & Finance, Business Issues, Company Relations, Education & Conference, Legislative/Regulatory, Membership, Nominations, PIANJ Golf Classic, Technical, Women's Business Forum; Awards: *Professional Agent of the Year* (1994).

Name: William R. Vowteras, CPIA

Agency: Fraser Brothers Group LLC, Edison, N.J.

Date of membership: 1995

Titles, positions or honors: PIANJ secretary, treasurer, vice president and president (2009-10); PIANJ board of directors; PIA committees: Executive/Budget & Finance, Government Affairs, Nominations, PIANJ/NJYIP Recruitment, Auto Task Force; past president of the NJYIP; Awards: *Professional Agent of the Year* (2011).



Don't forget to **Think PIA first!** If you have a question or a thought about something, there's a good chance that someone else has thought about it too. Let PIA be your go-to for information and resources.

Industry Resource Center, which can answer off-the-wall coverage questions; the behind-the-scenes work with the insurance department, with carriers, with legislative bodies—all work to make for a better environment in which to run your business. Every time I see someone who has left our organization due to the meager price of membership, I shake my head knowing that the agent did not take advantage of all that PIA has to offer—otherwise, the agent would not have left.

What advice would you give to someone starting out in either organization?

Campion Renna: Get involved in NJYIP and PIA! While some uninvolved agents may say: "Why socialize with my competitors?" "I have to be out there selling." "I

Anything else?



Name: Casey Yarger, CIC, CRM

Agency: Robert P. Petri & Daughter Agency, Milltown, N.J.

Date of membership: 2006

Titles, positions or honors: All officer positions for NJYIP, culminating with president in 2013-15; NJYIP board of director; NJYIP liaison to PIANJ Business Issues Committee; Awards: *YIP of the Year* (2016).

need to make a living.” I wholeheartedly suggest that if you are responsible for the success of your agency, sincere involvement in your trade organization will reap rewards that will save you time and money and, as I’ve experienced, lead to greater success.

Dougherty: The passage between YIP and PIA is fluid, so be patient. I became involved with CTYIP after I starting working at the insurance agency. My father, “Doc” Dougherty, had been president of PIACT a few years before and he still was involved in PIA. After spending about three years as a committee member of YIP, I transitioned to the PIACT board of directors. On the PIA board, I was in a bit over my head. I didn’t contribute much, but I learned plenty. A few years later, the then-incoming YIP President Jim Goodman, CIC, recruited me to return to YIP to be an officer and get in line to become president. I took him up on that offer and returned to YIP as chair of the Membership Committee and secretary. I became CTYIP president in 2002-03 and I returned to the PIACT board of directors in 2005, but I have remained a supporting member of CTYIP to this day.

Plafker: The relationships I’ve cultivated as PIA member, and the respect I earned in the industry because of my involvement on the PIANY board helped me to develop my agency and grow. I’m successful because I am involved in PIA, just as my dad was before me.

Vowteras: Go to events. Meet people. Get involved. Sometimes PIA meetings can be intimidating, but don’t be afraid to speak up and be a part of a committee or two.

Yarger: Probably the best advice that I received was: While the people in the room may be competitors, don’t think of them that way when at PIA events. We’re all in that room, not despite being competitors, but specifically because we *are*. We are all in this together to provide a higher level of service and professionalism, enhancing the reputation of the industry as a whole.

Bartow: I wish more companies and industry organizations would send their young employees to NY-YIP events. One of the biggest benefits of involvement in NY-YIP is the confidence it inspires. Involvement in the organization helps those starting out in their careers to develop industry and product knowledge; and build their own network of contacts. Those who get involved in NY-YIP don’t just do insurance, they love it. They are so proud of their accom-

plishments; are excited; and have joy in their careers.

Parsons: The tools we use in our industry may have changed over the years, but the basic premise is the same: Protect our customers properly; bring in new business to grow and offset lost business; and bring new people to grow and perpetuate. YIP and PIA can help you to do these things so you don’t need to reinvent the wheel.

Sidle: Don’t forget to **Think PIA first!** If you have a question or a thought about something, there’s a good chance that someone else has thought about it too. Let PIA be your go-to for information and resources.

Suydam: Through my involvement with the NJYIP and PIANJ boards, I learned about governance. I’m on a number of different boards (in and outside of the insurance industry), and I see how all the others don’t compare to PIA, in terms of effective governance. I know I have strengthened the other boards in which I am involved because of my work with PIA.

Yarger: I find the most active PIA members tend to be agency principals, managers, etc. Please, send your young employees to YIP. You may not think your employee will benefit from a single networking social event, but it’s more of a cumulative effect. Sure, I write more business as a result of being an active YIP member, but it’s the relationships that I have formed that have enhanced my career. ■

Czupryna is PIA’s member information manager.