

A Chat with Jen Bastien

MARKETING SPECIALIST/AGENT

PHILLIPPO INSURANCE AGENCY, STEPHENSON, MICHIGAN

Michigan Agent has been talking to students and agents new to our industry to discover their path to and experience in our industry.

What led you to a career in the insurance industry?

My route to the industry was a little unconventional. In 2012, I moved back home to southern Upper Peninsula after I graduated from Michigan Technological University. I was having trouble finding work and wanted to do something meaningful. I enrolled for a firefighter certification course and became a volunteer firefighter in my community in 2013.

About a year and a half ago, a fellow firefighter asked me if I would consider coming on board with his insurance agency. He needed someone to step in to a marketing role and thought my background in scientific and technical communication was a good fit. I accepted and delved in as a marketing specialist. I design and produce ads, work with local publishers, and maintain the web and social media sites.

Shortly after I started, my manager encouraged me to get licensed so I could build a career as an agent. I took the courses and training I needed and have been a licensed agent for more than a year now.

Where do you see yourself going in the business? What strategies will you take to get there?

Eventually, I would love to earn some industry designations. Right now, I simply want to stay focused

on learning as much as I can about the industry and products.

My manager at the agency is a great resource and has been a wonderful mentor. I'm also doing a combination of self-study and leveraging resources available through MAIA – including the discussion boards like MAIA's The MIX. Last year, I had the opportunity to attend the 2018 Young Agents Convention as a scholarship recipient. The Young Agents committee doesn't meet in the Upper Peninsula, so going to the conference was a great opportunity to network and learn about issues affecting the entire state. I found out that the MAIA does have a group for agents in the UP, so I plan to get involved.

What perceptions do you want to dispel about the insurance industry?

I didn't really expect to enjoy working in insurance as much as I do. I thought it would be a repetitive, boring desk job. It didn't take me long to find out that's not the case at all. I've been surprised at how much I like the work, and I want to continue my education and learn more.

I think what's important to remember about insurance is that you're doing a service and providing a product that helps people. My generation wants to make a difference and to know their job is affecting others in a positive way. Everyone needs insurance. It's a



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secure and growing career. And it's changing technologically in how we reach our customers and provide the products they need. That's exciting and interesting in itself.

How does your work as a volunteer firefighter tie in with your work as an insurance agent?

My volunteer work and my career are both focused on helping protect people and their livelihood. As a firefighter, I often see the darker side of things. I see people losing their home or their vehicles and having to start all over with next to nothing. And as an insurance agent, it's nice to be on the other side and help people restore their lives after tragedy.

I think a lot of what I do and the way I approach my career circles back to my parents. My dad was diagnosed with cancer when I was young and the community rallied around to support us. Probably my biggest motivator right now, though, is my kids. I want to raise them to be good people and community helpers. There is so much negativity now in our world, but there is always a place we can help out and ease the burdens

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RLAMOREAUX@MICHAGENT.ORG

of others in our communities.

Every day, I'm happy to know I'm part of an agency that is extremely community focused and a mainstay of the area where we do business. As a family-owned business, we're involved in a lot of causes that help to better our communities and assist our neighbors. We routinely support our local schools and sports teams, provide scholarships to graduating seniors, and assist with community fundraisers and supply/donation drives.

It means a lot to me to help people and to bring them peace of mind. I'm happy I've found the ability to help others through my work as a firefighter, an insurance agent, and most recently, as the newest member on the Stephenson City Council. ●



Ann Kammerer is a freelance writer living in East Lansing. She has written extensively about

business people, educators, artists and everyday citizens doing good things.