



Archer A. Associates, Inc., 2011 Agent of the Year!



Bob Zak, President and CEO of Merchants, far left, joins Charlie Torsiello, Principal at Archer A. Associates, Inc.; Charlie Makey, Senior Vice President for Insurance Operations at Merchants; Eric Feit, Assistant Vice President/Regional Manager, Eastern Strategic Business Center, Merchants; and Bob Vellecca, Territory Manager for Merchants.

Merchants Insurance Group extends congratulations to **Archer A. Associates, Inc.**, Franklin Square, New York, as the recipient of the 2011 *Agent of the Year* award. The award was presented to agency principal Charles Torsiello.

The *Agent of the Year* award recognizes one of Merchants' 600 partner agencies.

In order to qualify as Agent of the Year, we consider a number of variables, including: a proven historical profitable loss ratio; personal lines growth; commercial lines growth; new business growth trends; a mix of business that is aligned with Merchants' mix of business; good retention and above average quote conversion ratios; great service from agency staff to policyholders and Merchants' staff; agency training programs; community involvement; involvement in independent agent associations; the use of Merchants' automation; and a strong, experienced sales producer staff, with the knowledge and skills to use these and other tools to promote and retain quality business.

Archer A. Associates, Inc. has been with Merchants since 2001, and has also qualified for the 2012 President's Club.

“Charlie Torsiello and his team at Archer A. Associates are consummate professionals with a keen focus on the needs of their clients,” said Bob Zak, President and CEO of Merchants. “We are proud to have Archer represent Merchants, and congratulate them on being named our Agent of the Year.”

Please see “Agent of the Year”, p. 6

2012 President's Club Agencies Announced



Congratulations to the following agencies that have been named to the 2012 President's Club.

- Aaron L. Grober Agency
- Alpha Associates Inc. (Cali Agency Inc.)
- Archer A. Associates, Inc.
- Cafarelli Agency Ltd.
- Cross Insurance
- Dayton Ritz & Osborne
- Edwards and Company
- Gateway Insurance Group LLC (Turner-Liberty Agency Inc.)
- Industrial Coverage Corp.
- Lawley-Tradition LLC
- Libardi Service Agency
- LPL Risk Management Ltd.
- Maran Corporate Risk Associates Inc.
- R.J. Fregenti Associates Inc.
- Risk Placement Services Inc.

More details will be included in an upcoming issue of “Agent Focus”.

A MESSAGE FROM OUR PRESIDENT



Bob Zak
President & CEO

Where has winter gone – literally? Most areas in which we operate have enjoyed a benign winter season, with weather related losses running at a fraction of normal. However, let's not forget that it will take three years of similar experience to offset the dramatic impact weather had on 2011. As I mentioned in the last issue of *Agent Focus*, 2011 was a tough year.

We lost \$8 million, more than I noted in that letter. Nevertheless, Merchants responded well to the stresses placed upon it:

- We took great care of policyholders, particularly those who had weather related claims;
- Our investment portfolio responded to pay the high volume of weather losses; and
- Surplus finished 2011 up slightly from 2010, due to gains in the investment portfolio and an increase in deferred tax assets. However, investment income remains depressed and will not bail out underwriting for the industry.

Notwithstanding the good response to the stresses of 2011, much work remains to be done to improve margins to a level commensurate with the risk in our business. No doubt you have begun to experience premium increases, both base rate and discretionary, on many policies with Merchants. However, premium rates are still inadequate, and we

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Merchants Insurance Group's *AGENT FOCUS*

newsletter is designed exclusively for you, our valued agent partners. In each issue you will find highlights of recent product changes, technology developments and other news that will make it easier to do business with Merchants.

plan to continue to increase rates moderately.

We also continue our work to bring new and improved processes to you and your clients.

Please take a few minutes to page through this issue of *Agent Focus*. I'm sure you will see something that will help you grow your business!

In particular, note the independent agents highlighted throughout. Congratulations and thanks to our President's Club agencies (front page). In addition, I'd like to acknowledge the service of our local and national Agent Advisory Councils. Without the investment of their time and talent, we would not be as strong a Company. Thanks to two recently retired members of the national council: Mike Misour of Colonial Fleming in Springdale, Pennsylvania and Mike Kapture of Kapture Insurance in Flint, Michigan. A special thanks to Mick Marshall of Walker & Marshall (a member of Alpha Associates) in Bradford, PA for serving as chair of the national council.

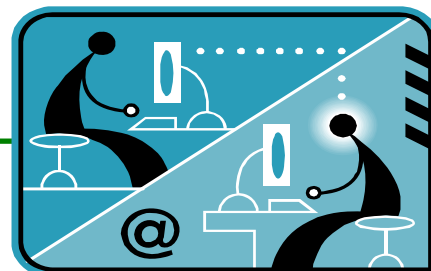
We have not closed the books on the first quarter of 2012, but expect it to be fairly good. And, we are confident in the steps we have taken to improve results during the balance of the year.

Thank you for your support, and for the opportunity to earn more of your business.

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We'd love to hear from you...

Please send us any suggestions about *AGENT FOCUS* or improving your Merchants' experience.
agentfocus@merchantsgroup.com



CLAIMS NEWS



*Need to report
a claim?*

*There's an app
for that!*

Our latest offering for reporting a personal automobile claim is a smartphone app, "Merchants Mobile," for iPhone and Android smartphones.

The app tells policyholders what to do in

the event of an accident; how to get roadside assistance; how to report a glass claim and how to document and report a claim to Merchants.

The app provides on-the-spot documentation for the

accident, such as recording details of the accident including vehicles and drivers involved; documenting damage, injuries and police involvement; taking photos; and submitting the claim via e-mail directly to Merchants' Claims Department. Merchants Mobile automatically downloads the policyholder's account information, including vehicles and drivers on the policy.

Merchants Mobile may be downloaded for **free** from the smartphone app stores. Simply search for "Merchants Insurance" in the respective app store to find the Merchants Mobile app.

For complete information, please see Bulletin #5242 (March 12, 2012).

To download the app, visit the appropriate store:

iTunes for Apple iPhones (<http://store.apple.com/us>)

Android Market (<https://market.android.com/?hl=en>)

Policyholder Online Claim Reporting

Policyholders can now file a claim online through Merchants' website, www.merchantsgroup.com. Claims can be filed for losses relating to:

- Personal Automobile
- Commercial Automobile
- Property
- General Liability
- Workers' Compensation

Online claims filing speeds up the claim process and provides a PDF confirmation of claim information for the policyholder's and agent's records.

There are two ways to report a claim online: through Merchants' home page or, if the policyholder has al-

ready logged in to our site, by clicking on the "Policy Management" page link.

Once a claim is submitted, the policyholder and their agent will receive a PDF confirmation, including their claim number. The claim is entered in the Merchants' Claim System and is assigned to a Claim Representative who will contact the policyholder within 24 hours.

In addition to online reporting, policyholders still have the option of reporting a claim to their agent or a Merchants' regional claims' office.

For complete information, see Bulletin #5229 (Jan. 9, 2012).

Merchants Now Offering Online Endorsements for Commercial Auto

To use this fast and easy service, log on to www.merchantsgroup.com, enter the Commercial Gateway and click on the “Endorsement Quote/Issue” button; select “Commercial Auto”.

Some of the features of our online Commercial Auto Endorsement process include the ability to provide quotes on “what if” scenarios using the copy quote function. You can also quote and submit most Commercial Auto changes such as:

- Adding, changing or deleting vehicles
- Modifications to coverage limits or deductibles
- Adding, changing or deleting additional interests or loss payees

- Updating driver information
- Changes to mailing or garage location addresses

If you need assistance, we have a recorded webinar in the “Tutorials” section of our website, and our Help Desk and “Live Chat” features are also available for assistance. The contact information for our help desk can be found on the bottom of each web page as you go through the endorsement entry process.

For complete information on the capabilities Online Endorsements for Commercial Auto provides, please refer to [Bulletin #5240](#) (February 6, 2012).

Robert Perno Takes Helm as Assistant Regional Manager, WSBC



Robert Perno,
Assistant
Regional Manager

Merchants is pleased to announce the promotion of Robert Perno to Assistant Regional Manager, Western Strategic Business Center, with the primary responsibility for the development of Michigan and Ohio.

In his new position Bob will report to Tina Schaedler, Assistant Vice President and Regional Manager of our Western Strategic Business Center in Buffalo.

Bob has been with Merchants for more than 10 years, beginning in 2001 as a Personal Lines Underwriter. Throughout his first 7 years he held this position and handled several territories including Ohio, Massachusetts, Rhode Island and Western New York. In 2008, he was promoted to Personal Lines Underwrit-

ing Specialist, where he trained agents and fellow colleagues on new product rollouts, among other tasks.

For the past year and a half he has been Corporate Sales Specialist, where he functioned as our agency management specialist and more recently, coordinator for our Producer Training School.

Bob holds a bachelor's degree in commerce with a concentration in management from Niagara University, and currently serves on the Board of Directors of the Insurance Club of Buffalo, organizer of the largest one-day insurance trade show in the country.

Merchants On-Demand

Your link to information now



*Haven't signed up yet?
What are you waiting for?!*

Merchants On-Demand is tailored for our agents' needs by supplying frequently updated insurance related material that can be reposted to sites such as Facebook and Twitter, as well as for agency websites and blogs.

Merchants On-Demand also includes sales flyers for personal, commercial and general products, so you

can quickly and easily access FREE information on our products. The materials can be printed or e-mailed to your policyholders, and they are updated as the products are updated.

To sign up, please visit [Merchants On-Demand](#) or www.merchants-on-demand.com.

National Co-Chair Advisory Council Convenes in Florida

Merchants' National Co-Chair Advisory Council, a select group of Merchants' agents, serves as a "sounding board" for our company. The Council meets twice a year to provide their professional insight on the insurance industry and regional market trends.

The meetings include a dialogue between the agents and Merchants. At the recent meeting in Florida, members presented a report on their local council meetings, and were given Merchants underwriting and claims updates, as well as details on billing enhancements.

General Reinsurance Corporation CEO John Chohnoky was the special guest speaker. He addressed industry trends and prospects, as well as predictive modeling in insurance.

The Council members had the opportunity to meet and discuss a number of issues, such as how to attract new personal lines customers, and how Merchants' agents can promote the use of new claim tools such as the Claims smartphone app.

National Co-Chair Advisory Council members in attendance were:

- Steve Hopkins, United Independent Agency Alliance Inc. (CSBC)
- Mike Kapture, Kapture Insurance Agency Inc. (CSBC)
- Anthony Pomilla, LPL Risk Management Ltd. (ESBC)
- Anthony Russo, Borrelli & Russo Agency Inc. (ESBC)
- Brett Balsley, Brett Balsley Insurance Group (MRO)
- Sal Abate, Anderson Jackson Metts Insurance (MRO)
- Jeff Foy, Foy Insurance Group Inc. (NERO)
- Mike Roberts, M.P. Roberts Insurance Agency Inc. (NERO)
- Mick Marshall, Walker & Marshall Insurance Agencies Inc. (WSBC)
- Mike Misour, Colonial Fleming Inc. (WSBC)
- Roger Saddlemire, Avid Insurance Agency Inc. (WSBC)

Welcome! The following agencies recently joined us:

CSBC

Creative Insurance Solutions
Beard Insurance Agency Inc.

NERO

USI Insurance Services of CT
USI Insurance Services of MA
USI Insurance Services of New England
Northern United Agents Alliance

WSBC

David L. Sidle Agency Inc.
ENV Property & Casualty LLC
Empire Spectrum LLC
James H. Hamill Associates Inc.
USA Payroll Agency NY LLC
Summit Insurance Group of PA
Wilfred E. Helwig Agency

NEW AGENCY APPOINTMENTS

Spring means contractors' season! *Are your insureds ready?*



- Have you reviewed coverages with your contractor insureds? Do they have adequate coverage for new or replacement equipment?
- Do they have safety programs in place?

It's never too late to help your insureds get on the right track for safety and proper coverage!

Agents in the News

Merchants Insurance Group is proud of our agents!

Hunter Insurance, Inc. Re-Certified as "Five Star Agency" by MAIA

Congratulations to **Hunter Insurance, Inc.** of Manville, RI, as it has recently been recertified as a Five Star Insurance Agency by The Massachusetts Association of Insurance Agents (MAIA).

The Five Star Award of Distinction is awarded by MAIA to independent insurance agencies that successfully complete a "fitness review" which examines five keys to an agency's success: customer focus, management/leadership excellence, human resource excellence, process and product excellence, and future success, which means the agency is work-

ing with the latest technology, is actively marketing themselves and their products, and is truly involved with philanthropic activities in their community.

There are only 29 independent agencies in Massachusetts and Rhode Island that have received the Five Star Agency designation.

Hunter Insurance, Inc., part of Trusted Insurance Alliance, has been a Merchants' partner agency since 1993, and was named Merchants' "Agent of the Year" for 2010. Please see vol. 11 of "Agent Focus" for more information.

"Agent of the Year," cont'd from p. 1

"We, at Archer A. Associates, Inc., are truly honored to have been selected by Merchants Insurance Group as the Agent of the Year for 2011," Torsiello said. "The executives at Merchants embody the spirit of partnership and commitment to Independent Agents which proves crucial to us reaching common goals in service to our clients. I am pleased to accept this award on behalf of Archer A. Associates Inc., its partners and staff, all of whom contributed to this achievement."

Archer A. Associates, Inc. insurance agency was established in 1952 to serve personal and business insurance needs. Since that time, the agency has grown to a large professional staff of licensed insurance producers and trained assistants. Archer serves the insurance needs of almost 4,000 individuals and families, and 1,500 businesses in New York State. For more information, the agency may be reached at www.archerins.com.

65 Years and Still Going Strong!



Farmington, New Hampshire's **Turner-Liberty Insurance, part of Gateway Insurance Group**, recently marked its 65-year partnership with Merchants. Paul Turner, of Turner-Liberty, second from left, accepts the plaque from Merchants' Charlie Makey, far left, Jim Carr, and Kevin Lasante.

Turner-Liberty has also qualified for our 2012 President's Club. Congratulations!