

Insurance Library Has Rich History, Exciting Future

BOSTON —The Insurance Library Association of Boston recently named Paul Tetrault, JD, CPCU, ARM, AIM, as its new executive director. **The Standard** sat down with Tetrault and the association's librarians to discuss the library's educational offerings, its collection and plans for the future.

"We're excited about the start of the year. There's a lot of energy among staff, membership and trustees that we're going to harness," said Tetrault. Although Tetrault is new to the executive director position, he is no stranger to the library. He began taking classes there in the early 1990s while working at **The Standard**. He has an immense appreciation for the library's value as an educational institution and hopes to spread the word throughout the insurance industry, here in New England and beyond. "It is an amazing institution that is recognized as such by some people but not enough. There is a huge untapped audience not only for the library's services but to be part of what it can offer," he said.

Among the library's offerings are classes, research opportunities and an impressive collection of historical and current material. The library is well known for

offering professional education classes from beginner foundational courses to more advanced classes meant to hone specific skills in a particular area. What may be less known is that in addition to classes offered at the library's State Street location in Boston, instructors will travel to companies, agencies and brokerages to offer onsite classes.

Webinars are the newest offerings. Last September, the library began offering traditional webinars that focus on a single topic for two or three hours, according to Meagan Stefanow, reference librarian and education coordinator. She noted that webinars are currently scheduled through March, including one by Bill Wilson, CPCU, on his book, "When Words Collide," on Jan. 30th.

"The webinars give us a chance to partner with other organizations," added Sarah Hart, reference librarian. There are sponsorship opportunities for companies and agencies as well as for industry vendors. Sponsorship includes publicity and advertising for the firms as well as seats in the webinar for employees.

For most of the library's 132 year his-

tory, it has been a locally oriented institution; however, the webinars give it greater reach, noted Tetrault. He has high hopes that greater exposure on educational offerings like webinars will build a new audience for research offerings.

In their combined 30 plus years at the library, Stefanow and Hart have spent a great deal of time on insurance research projects. They have worked with attorneys and expert witnesses conducting research on unique coverage issue cases. There are countless long-tail cases spanning decades that require researching policy law from the 1950s and 1960s for coverage interpretation as well as that require contemporary secondary source material. "We have some great stories, but they are privileged and we can't share them!," said Stefanow.

Hart recalled finding one article from a risk manager years ago predicting that umbrella liability insurance wasn't going to be around long. "It's a lesson to never predict the demise of a line of coverage," joked Stefanow.

Kidding aside, "very significant cases with a lot at stake can turn on an

esoteric fact or finding,” said Tetrault.

The library’s collection is nothing short of mind boggling, according to Tetrault. Hart agreed, noting that even after working there for 17 years, there are still treasures to discover.

Library Assistant Jennifer Valentine noted the library’s fairly substantial collection of old policies that date back into the 1800s, some of which are works of art in and of themselves.

One of the most popular parts of the collection are the Sanborn fire insurance maps. They are used by professionals across the insurance industry: Producers access the maps to see what risk they are insuring; property inspectors look at them when an insurance company is taking on a new risk; architects want to see where fire walls are located; attorneys research where an old factory was in relation to waterways.

Tetrault, a self-professed old soul who has a passion for collecting, said he can’t believe the depth and breadth of the library’s collection. Although



The Insurance Library Association of Boston’s Sarah Hart, Paul Tetrault, Meagan Stefanow and Jennifer Valentine with one volume of the Sanborn Fire Insurance map collection.

the library is dependent on memberships and donations to support itself like other institutions that have a public purpose, Tetrault is on a mission to

convey the understanding that the industry is a richer place for the existence of the library. “Insurance is a fascinating business and part of that is its history.” ■

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