

The Claims World Loses One of Its Best: MIKE NOAKES

BY CARL VAN



“Howdy.” That’s how Mike greeted everyone he knew, and sometimes people he didn’t know.

During the course of my claims career, I have had the opportunity to work with some truly exceptional people. Mike Noakes was one of them.

Mike Noakes joined the insurance claims industry in 1980 as a claims adjuster trainee at Progressive Insurance. Through the years, he moved up the ranks to claims supervisor, claims manager and regional manager.

Mike continued to turn down numerous high level positions in other locations of the county, choosing to stay in the Sacramento area because he wanted a stable family and church life.

Mike hired me as a claims adjuster many years ago, and I had the honor of working for him during a period of growth at our company.

As my manager, Mike showed extraordinary concern for his employees and his customers. He was respected for his knowledge of course, but his commitment to the people around him was his most profound leadership quality. More than anything else, Mike was known as a remarkable mentor to anyone who wanted to improve and do his or her best. He used to tell aspiring managers, “Be proactive. Think like an owner.”

Mike was the first to promote me into claims management. Working along side Mike, I was constantly impressed with how he inspired people to do their best.

As I grew to know Mike over the years, I found him to be an incredibly dedicated family man, as well as a respected leader in his church. Mike married his wife Sheila on February 3, 1977. Together they had three children, Shelby, Chad and Nicole. Mike of course adored his grandchildren, Halle, Cohen, James, Brady,

Olivia and Everett.

At his church, Mike served as bishop in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in Rocklin, California. Mike enjoyed giving his time to helping others, and held callings his entire life. He had the unique ability to make those around him feel important.

In 2002 Mike accepted a position with a start up company called Esurance, and was asked to build a claims department. Since its inception, Mike guided the claims organization through its expansion as its Corporate Claims Director.

Throughout his career, Mike was the recipient of many honors and awards such as Claims Manager of the Year, Best Claims Office, and many others.

A few years ago, when I was developing my theories on identifying traits that make great claims professionals, I started with two main categories: Givers and Takers. Mike was my inspiration for the Givers category.

Mike Noakes passed away on April 9, 2012, when he succumbed to non-Hopkins Lymphoma. The claims world certainly lost one of its best.

Just recently, we produced a music CD by *Carl Van and the Awesome Adjuster Band*. The title of the CD is “I’m a Claims Man”, which is the final song on the CD. We dedicated that song to Mike as follows: “This song is dedicated to Mike Noakes, the best claims man we’ve ever known.”

Mike enjoyed playing golf, reading, and was quite proud of his guitar collection. He was kind, patient and thoughtful. The impact he had on everyone around him was truly amazing, and will never be forgotten.

I will miss him terribly. I can’t bring myself to say good-bye, so for now, I’ll just say, “Howdy Mike.” ■

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CARL: It’s just coming out, so I am not sure of the actual release date yet. But ultimately, it will be available on our websites at www.InsuranceInstitute.com and www.ClaimsMusic.com. It will also be available digitally on iTunes, Amazon and other outlets.

CPN: Best of luck with your new project. What’s next on the horizon?

CARL: I promised my wife I would take a break from projects

for a while. But I do have two new books coming out in 2013. The first is *Negotiation Skills for the Claims Professional*, which I co-wrote with Teresa Headrick, our Director of Course Design, who I met through SITE (Society of Insurance Trainers and Educators). The other is *Awesome Claims Customer Service*, which I wrote mostly myself, but I had a great deal of help from long time friends, Jim Wilson and Greg Larman.

CPN: As always, best of luck. ■