



SIIA President & CEO Mike Ferguson

# SIIA ENDEAVORS

On the Record with SIIA President & CEO Mike Ferguson

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*he Self-Insurer's* Editor Gretchen Grote sat down with SIIA President & CEO Mike Ferguson for a wide-ranging interview to talk about how the association continues to evolve and play an increasingly important role in helping its members be successful in the self-insurance marketplace.

**Gretchen Grote:** It seems SIIA been particular busy with a variety of new initiatives, can you catch our readers up where the association has been focusing its efforts?

**Mike Ferguson:** I have been with SIIA for about 25 years, and we are busier now than ever to advance our membership service capabilities. There are three initiatives of particular importance this year.

First, we successfully launched Canoe, an on-line education and information platform for those involved in the self-insurance and captive insurance marketplace. We continue to expand high quality content including conference sessions, studio videos, webinars and interviews. You can think of Canoe as the "Netflix" for self-insurance and SIIA members receive a free subscription as part their membership dues.

Canoe is also where you can view SIIA News & Views, which is the second exciting initiative I want to mention. This is a monthly video news program created for the self-insurance industry. There is nothing like it and our members really seem to like it. Everyone should watch for a new addition the first Monday of each month.

The third big ticket priority has been to build out SIIA's Future Leaders initiative, designed to get younger SIIA members more involved in the organization. We recently held a well-received mentor connection event and have incorporated special content and networking opportunities as part of our upcoming National Conference & Expo.

To help steer SIIA going forward we established a Future Leaders Committee and that group will soon be planning activities and related member services for 2020 so stay tuned to hear about what's next.

**GG: I see that SIIA has been proactively reaching out to the broker/adviser community. What is the thought process behind this?**

**MF:** While the membership has historically included some forward-thinking brokers/advisers, our past experience has been that the majority of brokers/advisers have not fully appreciated the advantages of self-insurance and how this could be a growth opportunity for their businesses. But it's clear now that times are changing, with self-insurance becoming the approach of choice for those advising employers on how to best control health care costs.

SIIA is excited about all the positive momentum and invites this new generation of self-insurance advocates to become members of our organization. We believe by joining our organization it will give them access to useful information and educational content, as well as to a large number of potential business partners who can help deliver self-insurance solutions for their clients.

And while we obviously think these membership benefits are important, I would suggest that the value of SIIA involvement is even broader than that, as it will position them to be an active industry participant given that our organization is where the important industry players connect to solve problems, influence policy-makers and identify strategies to grow the self-insurance marketplace.

**GG: We've seen numerous announcements over the last couple of years of companies upgrading to Diamond, Gold or Silver member status, can you talk a little about SIIA's approach relative to these membership categories and the factors that have contributed to the apparent growth?**

**MF:** Unlike many other trade organizations that are relatively homogeneous in

terms of size and business focus, SIIA is much more heterogeneous. We have smaller members with varying degrees of industry focus to companies with billion-dollar balance sheets that focus exclusively on the self-insurance marketplace. Because of this disparity, it does not make sense to have a single membership category, so we have created multiple membership categories with different dues rates and benefit packages. This has enabled companies to plug into SIIA at various entry points.

With regard to the increase in higher level membership, I think the bigger companies in our industry like what SIIA has been doing and would like to see us continue to "scale," to put in growth company terms, so that we can further promote and protect their business interests.

**GG: I understand SIIA expanded its government relations teams again this year. What can you tell us about this?**

**MF:** Thanks to the increased membership support I just mentioned, SIIA was able to add another senior level lobbyist to its government relations team. This year we recruited for someone who could help specifically with outreach to congressional Democrats and we found Cristina Antelo who has turned out to be a perfect fit.

While SIIA is not a Republican nor Democratic organization we have historically had stronger connection with



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Republican members of Congress and other policy-influencers. With the addition of Cristina we have been able to better balance out our advocacy capabilities.

**GG: I guess on a related note, you have commented publicly on several occasions about how important it is for SIIA to become more a major player in terms of political contributions. Can you elaborate a bit on why this should be such a priority and any progress that has been made to move in this direction?**

**MF:** I have actually been saying this for the past several years and this objective has continued to move up the list of association priorities. There are two primary reasons for this emphasis, with the one reason being fairly obvious for most members, with the second reason less obvious for those who are not creatures of the DC lobbying world.

The obvious reason, of course, is that it is much easier to make and keep friends on Capitol Hill if you provide financial support for their campaigns. This does not mean that if you contribute to a specific member of Congress that they are certain to vote a specific way, but it's certainly easier to get a meeting with the member and/or their senior staff to explain your issues.

Not so obvious to those outside the beltway is that when an organization establishes itself as a political financial player, it raises your "street cred," so to speak, with other important organizations in town that we may need to partner with on various lobbying efforts.

In this regard, I am pleased to report that SIIA is now well positioned with some of the powerful associations in DC, including the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, National Association of Manufacturers, and at least one major labor organization.

Our progress has been somewhat slow but steady since we established the Self-Insurance Political Action Committee (SIPAC) about seven years ago as a vehicle for SIIA members to channel political contributions to key members of Congress. Things have accelerated over the past two years thanks to this more dedicated focus, combined with increased staffing resources, and you are now starting to see SIIA really establishing itself as a money player in DC. Obviously, we are not the biggest player by any means, but it's solid progress that is sure to greatly assist our advocacy efforts.



**GG: So how has SIPAC positioned itself, given that we are approaching another hot election year?**

**MF:** The 2020 elections will be here before we know it, so SIPAC is already planning with targeted contribution to several candidates in important and competitive races. Before this election cycle is over, SIPAC expects to support more candidates for federal office than ever before, and we couldn't do it without support

from our members. This support allows us to further leverage our membership and offer support to candidates who understand and are helpful to our industry. It is also important to note that SIPAC supports both Democrat and Republican candidates to ensure that we are not viewed as a partisan organization.

**GG: How do you view SIIA's role in the captive insurance space, as this membership constituency continues to grow?:**

**GG:** My view is that SIIA is playing a very unique and useful role in the captive insurance space by integrating its stakeholders into the much broader self-insurance world. This is important because mid-market employers are

becoming increasingly sophisticated in how they manage risk, understanding that they can integrate multiple self-insurance strategies that may include the formation of a captive insurance company. SIIA brings this all together, giving captive insurance professionals more educational and networking resources.

I am also pleased to announce that SIIA is now ramping up its political advocacy in Washington, DC to order to better position the captive insurance market segment with key policy-makers. Unfortunately, many of those who influence the legislative and regulatory process affecting captives have minimal or no understanding of why an increasing number of employers rely on them to deal with risk management strategies. We intend to change that, and you will be hearing more about these efforts in the months ahead.

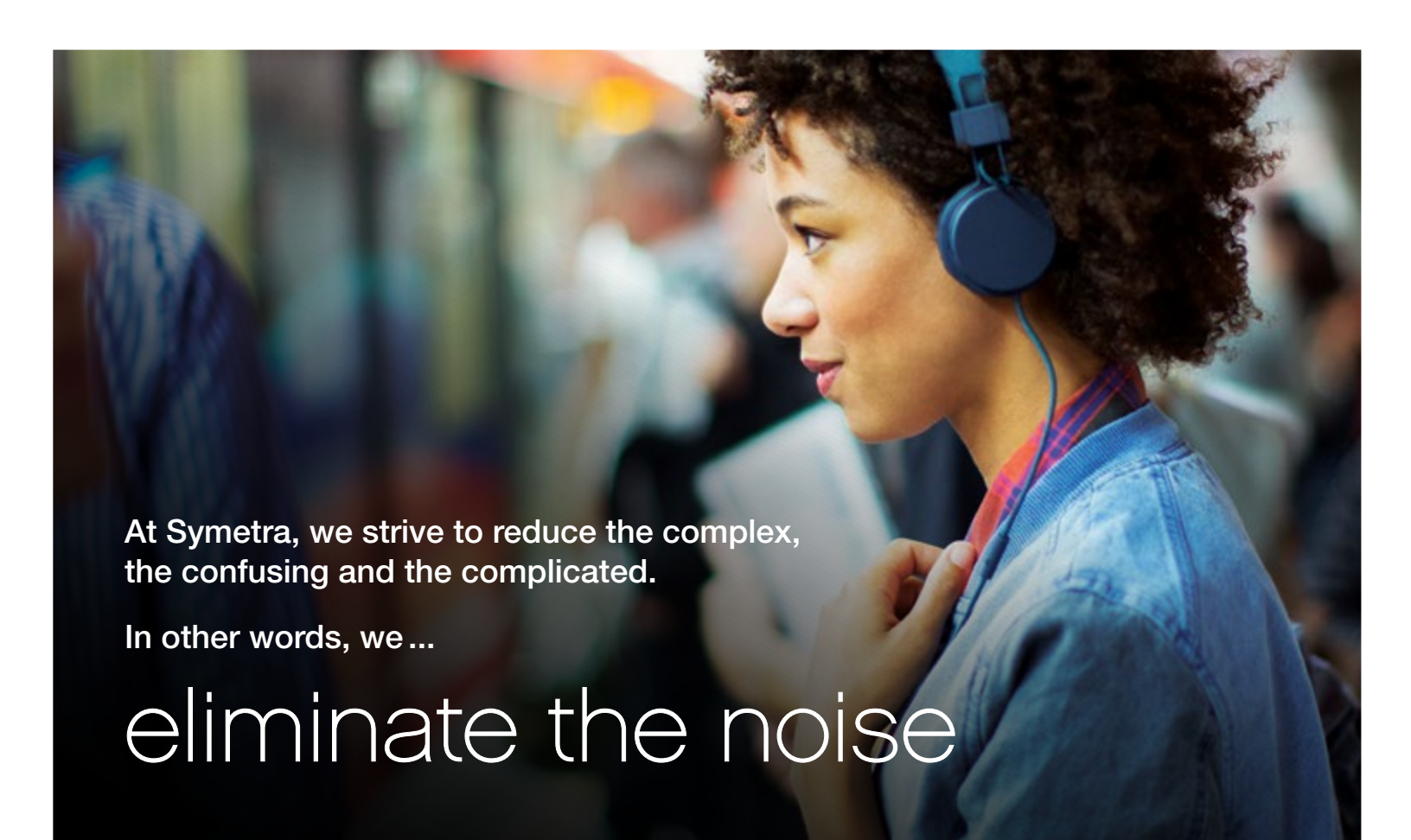


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**GG: SIIA has a distinct membership constituency comprised of companies involved with self-insured workers' compensation programs. Can you give us an idea of some association initiatives that appeal specifically to these members?**

**MF:** Yes, we have a very active segment of members involved with self-insured worker's compensation programs, including group self-insured funds. In addition to SIIA's Workers' Compensation Executive Forum, some key initiatives are the development of online educational content for group fund trustees, addressing expected regulatory staffing turnover in many states, and identifying issues where SIIA's lobbying and media relations team can provide value. We also expect to focus more on getting younger members involved consistent with the association's broader Future Leaders initiative.

**GG: SIIA's Fusion initiative seems to be getting a lot of attention lately. What is this all about?**

**MF:** SIIA's membership is comprised of individuals with diverse expertise and business contacts within the broad self-insurance marketplace. The Fusion initiative is intended to facilitate the sharing of information and business referrals among members involved with self-insured health plans, captive insurance and self-insured workers' compensation programs. Several members have been doing this very effectively on an individual basis, but we hope to greatly expand these types of interactions, which have the potential to be game-changers for many companies.

Consistent with this objective, we have incorporated a dedicated Fusion educational track as part of the San Francisco conference, which features topics that we believe will be of interest to multiple membership constituencies. These sessions have the added benefit of getting people in the same room who normally would not be, so we anticipate some organic networking will occur.

This initiative is still in the early development stage and we are optimistic that it will take form in a way that delivers real value to our members that they will not be able to get anywhere else.

**GG: There certainly sounds like a lot of exciting things going on at SIIA. What advice would you give industry executives who want to become more active in the organization?**

**MF:** Well of course, become a member if you are not already. Showing up at association events is a big deal because SIIA is a very interactive and social organization and there is no substitute for being there. We also recruit members to serve on our various volunteer committees and participate in periodic grassroots lobbying campaigns, which are great involvement opportunities. I like to say we are happy to put our members to work, so be on the lookout for announcements.

For more information visit [www.sii.org](http://www.sii.org). ■



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