



SIIA President & CEO Mike Ferguson

SIIA ENDEAVORS

SIIA Endeavors: On the Record with
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The *Self-Insurer* 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: Let's jump in and talk about how SIIA has positioned itself in the ongoing COVID environment.

Mike Ferguson: Yes, I guess ongoing is the best description to use as you and I are talking today. Shortly after last year's virtual National Conference we assessed that in-person events were not going to be viable for at least the first half of 2021 so we concluded that it was going to be critical to pivot on how we delivered educational content and networking opportunities.

Of course, this meant developing a comprehensive virtual strategy, which is exactly what we did. But before figuring out all of the details, we addressed a messaging issue, which was the perception that most people were getting tired of the term "virtual." This prompted us to launch our "Connect from Anywhere" or "CFA" brand.

Through this CFA format, we produced a packed schedule of educational content ranging from one-hour webinars to three-day conferences. This was supplemented by monthly networking events that proved to be very popular as a solution to keep members connected.

So while we would of course have liked to have been able to produce in-person events earlier in the year, we received great feedback from many CFA event participants, which validated our strategy.

We view our National Conference as a transition point where an in-person component is being blended back in alongside the CFA format, allowing people options on how they would like to participate considering the current COVID environment.

GG: Let's talk more about that. Can you provide more detail about how SIIA is taking a unique approach to producing a large industry event given complicated COVID considerations?

MF: As we monitored developments earlier in the year, it became clear that two distinct membership populations were taking shape – those who are not likely to attend in-person conferences in the near-term regardless of vaccination developments, and others who are very much ready to get back to such events.

Based on this observation, we made the decision to create a hybrid event that will allow those from both populations to participate in whatever way they deem best and that are consistent with company policies. While most organizations have decided to go one way or the other, our bet is that we can deliver the best of both formats.

Obviously additional planning needed to be done to ensure that we can mitigate COVID transmission as much as possible and multiple safety protocols will be incorporated as part of the in-person event. But we saw an opportunity to create a safer environment by changing the format in a way that provides more flexibility for in-person attendees.

First and foremost, we are setting things up to facilitate networking and business meetings. This will include a dedicated networking lounge/exhibit area supplemented by tables/chairs spread out over two large floors of the hotel. Given the extensive amount of space available, this will help attendees control how much or how little interaction they have with other attendees.

For those who want to catch some of the educational content while in Austin, they will also have control over that as well. They can join with other SIIA members in designated viewing areas, or view sessions privately via their laptop/electronic device from wherever they are.

Not only do we think this new format will improve attendee experience generally, this approach also takes COVID transmission risk into consideration by allowing for attendees to participate and engage on their own terms.

GG: Switching gears just a bit, can you update our readers about Canoe, SIIA's on-line educational platform?

MF: Canoe's value continues to increase as now SIIA members easy access to nearly 200 pieces of unique content, including recordings of all our CFA events from this year. I like to call it the "Netflix for Self-Insurance" and all employees of SIIA member companies can access it for free. For those members who have not already checked it out, I encourage them to do so at www.siiacano.org It's really a great benefit that can be utilized by all employees of SIIA member companies.

GG: It's been a few years since the launch of the SIIA Future Leaders Initiative. How have things been going and what we can expect going forward?

MF: Let me first say that this remains one of the association's most important strategic initiatives as the generational

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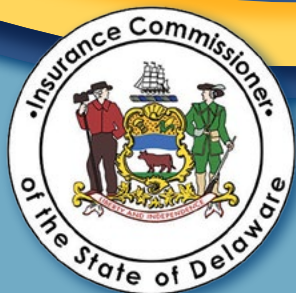
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The obvious reason, of course, is that it is much easier to make and keep friends on Capitol Hill if you provide financial support for their campaigns. This does not mean that if you contribute to a specific member of Congress that they are certain 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.

shift continues to accelerate in our industry. Like other association initiatives, we have been a little challenged by ongoing COVID developments, but still offered multiple engagement opportunities specific for our younger members.

These included two CFA events – a first ever Future Leader Forum, along with another Mentor Connection Forum. Both events were very well received based on attendee feedback.

The SFL committee will be meeting before the end of the year to plan initiatives for 2022 and I expect some exciting news to announce soon.

GG: You have commented publicly on several occasions about how important it is for SIIA to become more of a major player in terms of political contributions. Can you elaborate a bit on why this should be such a priority and give 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, and the second reason less obvious for those who are not creatures of the DC lobbying world.

Our progress has been somewhat slow but steady since we established the Self-Insurance Political Action Committee (SIPAC) about eight years ago as a vehicle for SIIA members to channel political contributions to key members of Congress. Things have accelerated over the past few 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 has already directly complimented advocacy efforts and we expect even more positive results after the upcoming election.

GG: I have seen that SIIA has been involved in some litigation efforts this year. Can you bring our readers up to speed on this?

MF: For those who may not be aware, SIIA has a long history of either leading or supporting litigation efforts to support the interests of our members when legislative/regulatory advocacy opportunities are not viable. These efforts are financed through the association's Legal Defense Fund (LDF), which in turn is funded by voluntary contributions from the members.

This year, at the specific request of various members, SIIA's LDF has funded the filing of two separate Amicus Briefs at the federal and state level. One case was focused on protecting health plan sponsors and participants from nefarious hospital billing practices with the other involving the ability of plan sponsors that take advantage of specialty cost containment opportunities. We expect rulings for both cases in the coming months.

Another litigation effort we supported last year proved successful earlier this year when the U.S. Supreme Court issued a unanimous ruling declaring that the IRS improperly imposed a reporting requirement rule that adversely affected many captive insurance company owners and their advisors.

GG: So on that last note, how do you view SIIA's role in the captive insurance space, as this membership constituency continues to grow?

MF: 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, networking and advocacy resources.

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I am particularly pleased to see how much progress SIIA has made over the past year with political advocacy in Washington, DC in order to better position the captive insurance market segment with key policymakers.

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 are making real progress and look forward to even more positive results in 2022.

GG: Tell us about the CrowdSource Forum coming up in December

MF: We are taking one last opportunity to get members together before the end of the year to talk about the hottest issues affecting our industry. The format will be a series of moderated roundtable sessions with each focused on a single topic including: price transparency, cell & gene therapy, specialty drug cost, technology, and workforce development.

We'll be back at the Charleston Place Hotel in Charleston, SC so it will also be a great opportunity for holiday dinners and year-end client entertainment opportunities. For those who are not able to join us in person, a livestream connection option will be available so everyone can be part of the conversation.

GG: What is SIIA's 2022 event calendar going to look like?

MF: Broadly speaking, members can expect to see a combination of in-person and connect from anywhere (virtual) events. And for some of the in-person events, there will be a livestream connection option. This approach this will continue to allow for members to access SIIA in whatever way that makes sense for them.

More specifically, the event schedule will include at least three entirely new events that will appeal to different membership constituencies. We expect to announce the event calendar next month so watch for details then.

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 – as they are available-- 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. ■