



**NEWS RELEASE**  
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### **Independent Insurance Agents of Houston and the Community**

**HOUSTON, TX (February 10, 2010)** – Seldom do you hear about what people in the insurance industry do other than sell insurance. Many media outlets portray the insurance industry as a collection of wealthy executive officers drawing huge salaries and adjusters busily denying claims, as the consumer reads a local story about another rate increase. While some of this is accurate, the vast majority of our industry is comprised of hard working insurance company employees, as well as tens of thousands of agents handling requests for personal asset protection. The stories regarding the billions of dollars invested in communities across America by insurance companies and their agents are never mentioned, and we almost never hear of the tens of thousands of people earning a livelihood, raising families, paying taxes, and serving their clients, neighbors, and communities all across this great country.

The largest local chapter of Independent Insurance Agents in the United States is in Houston, Texas. The founding members of the Independent Insurance Agents of Houston came together out of a sense of community and service, perpetuating the ideal of service which has made the United States the greatest country on earth. For over a hundred years, IIAH members have been active in community service and charitable activities. Some member and association activities in the recent past includes:

**IIAH Charitable Foundation** – for decades, our Houston agents have contributed to various charities through our own Charitable Foundation. Through events such as the IIAH Charity Gala and Beach Bowl, Charitable raises and donates several thousand dollars to local charities annually. One of its most acclaimed contributions to the community is the **Firefighter of the Year Award**. This January marked its 32<sup>nd</sup> Annual Firefighter of the Year Ceremony. The partnership began as a way for the Independent Insurance Agents of Houston to recognize the outstanding work and people of the Houston Fire Department.

Each year the HFD provides the IIAH committee with nominees from its Valor Awards Ceremony. Our Charitable committee meets with each candidate individually, allowing an opportunity to not only hear about the event which led to the nomination, but also to learn about his or her family and hobbies. Once the interviews are completed the committee must make the hard decision as to which candidate should be the recipient of the award. For the committee, having to choose the best of the best for the year is the most difficult part of the process, and rarely do they reach an unanimous decision. Once decided, IIAH holds an annual awards luncheon in January with a large attendance from member agencies, firefighter nominees, their

- more -

Scot West  
IIAH and Community  
2-10-09

families, and dignitaries from HFD. Each nominee is introduced and the action which led to his or her nomination is recounted to an attentive audience. The recipient of the award receives a plaque recognizing them as the Houston Firefighter of the Year and is accompanied by a check from IIAH. In addition, the committee presents the HFD Captain with a monetary donation to the Firefighter's charity.

**Hurricane Katrina relief fund, 2006** – IIAH collected \$43,000 from member agents within 72 hours of putting out the call for assistance. This money was immediately dispersed to local shelters who were tending to evacuees from New Orleans. The money purchased Wal-Mart cards, blankets, toiletries, and sundries for those who came here with nothing. Several of our affiliates also made personal and corporate deliveries of canned goods, water, and toiletries. Member agents also provided office space for displaced businesses, and in some cases our new neighbors became valued employees.

**Young Agents** – another Independent Insurance Agents of Houston committee, in which every year they choose several different charitable organizations to donate their time to, as well as collect monetary donations on their behalf. This past winter, the Young Agents partnered with Be An Angel Foundation to make its Snow Day at T.H. Rogers Elementary School one of its best yet. Through the support of the industry, the Young Agents were able to provide five fully decorated Christmas Trees, all of which were donated to underprivileged families; cookies and juice for all 830 students on Snow Day, as well as make a monetary donation to Be An Angel for almost \$700. We encourage all new members of the industry, young or old, to get involved with this committee.

Most of our members have at least one employee, if not more, spearheading or actively participating in charitable projects. Some examples include:

**Katrina Masek of Brady, Chapman, and Holland** Insurance says their agency has twenty employees working on Habitat for Humanity this fall in Houston; Mark Bauer who works with Bridges to Communities; and three staff members who make "Kid's Meals" and deliver them each Thursday of the month to children in need. **Walter Tomlinson of RPS - Leicht General Agency** coordinates the firm's collection and delivery of "We Care" packages to the troops in Afghanistan and Iraq. They recently shipped 200 pounds of food and hygiene items to our troops in the Middle East. **Jim Cook of Pathfinder/LL&D Insurance Group** founded a 501C which supports Houston area teens in need of mentoring, as well as established an orphanage in Honduras where more than 99% of the funds raised go towards school supplies, clothing and sundries for the children. The Honduras organization has built and equipped a schoolhouse and dormitory for these children. **Karen Norrid of J.H. Blades & Co., Inc.** coordinates charitable activities and confirms they have raised over \$35,000 through charitable events for the Multiple Sclerosis Society over the last five years, as well as raised substantial donations for the Barbara Bush Foundation for Family Literacy over the last 15 years. **Bob Holloway of USI Southwest**, an active member and elder of his church, has been involved in a church sponsored mentoring program where he mentors middle school children in less prosperous school districts within the greater Houston area. He has spent countless weekends in these schools to ensure their campuses and schoolrooms are ready for the new school year, as well as participated in mission trips.

- more -

Scot West  
IIAH and Community  
2-10-09

**Mike Hotchkiss of Hotchkiss Insurance Agency** writes, "our agency adopts a needy family through the Greater Houston Builders Association each year. We collect \$1000-\$1500 which is more than sufficient to provide a family with all its requested items, as well as some additional items not listed, such as gift cards to Wal-Mart, Kroger, and local fast food restaurants. I collect donations for about three weeks then pick a day to do all the shopping. We have an office "wrapping crew" that separates and wraps the gifts, and then we deliver the gifts to the GHBA, which in return delivers the gifts to the family. Also, our agency is providing insurance for a homebuilder who is remodeling a home for abused women and children; and we have insured a builder project that generated funds for breast cancer research through the sale of a new home." HIA has also donated furniture to The Yellowstone Academy for its administrative office at its new campus, and Mike and his wife, Diane, were volunteer leaders for Young Life in Northwest Harris County for 8 years. **Fred Steve of Myron F. Steves** relayed the following: "The employees of Myron Steves participated in several community service projects in 2009. First, Habitat for Humanity, where for the second year, Myron Steves sponsored a project to help our Texas Gulf Coast community in the wake of Hurricane Ike. We joined with Houston Habitat for Humanity to sponsor the building of a Habitat home; we committed the funds to construct the home and then individual contributions were made by employees, agents, vendors, and insurance company partners, all of which were matched by Myron Steves. Due to the excess raised in funds, Myron Steves will be partnering with Habitat for Humanity in 2010 to build another home. In addition to monetary contributions made, companies, agents, and vendors generously contributed their time and labor to the project. In October 2009, ten to twenty employees participated in the project daily, some returning on multiple days; the home was constructed within six days. At the dedication in January 2010, Myron Steves presented the family with a lawnmower, weed eater, garden hose, and reel, as well as a few other accessories, and its office in San Antonio provided house warming gifts. Second, we have a Bunko Fund Raiser. This is an on-premises fund raiser for the Ronald McDonald House. Each employee player contributes \$10 and plays Bunko in our training room during lunch. Myron Steves contributes gift cards for prizes, and offers pizza and soda water for lunch. The event raised \$500 and we had around fifty employees participating. Third, we joined Toys for Tots where employees brought new toys to our holiday lunch. We had several reserve Marines in their dress blues who were able to attend and helped deliver many of the toys prior to Christmas. Fourth, we volunteered with Crossroads. Crossroads is a homeless shelter which offers showers, laundry, meals, clothing, and toiletries two days per week in the gym of a church in Southeast Houston. It receives meager support from several churches so Myron Steves' employees collected and delivered clothing, soap, and shampoo to the shelter for distribution to the homeless. Due to our contribution, over one hundred Christmas stockings were filled and distributed at Crossroads' Christmas party."

These are only a few instances of the unheralded, good works of the members of Independent Insurance Agents of Houston. They do not do this for recognition or reward. They contribute to their community and country out of a sense of duty and appreciation. So next time you think about your independent insurance agent, remember their commitment to your community, as well as their ability to provide you with a great service and product!

#### **About IIAH**

The Independent Insurance Agents of Houston, (IIAH) including Trusted Choice agencies, is the nation's largest local

- more -

Scot West  
IIAH and Community  
2-10-09

association of independent insurance agencies, representing nearly 6,000 independent insurance agents and their staff. Independent agents represent multiple insurance companies; they are not employees of any single insurance company. With an independent agent, consumers are able to comparison shop for cost-effective and customized coverage. An active advocate on behalf of independent agents before legislative, regulatory and judicial bodies, IIAH is affiliated with the Independent Insurance Agents & Brokers of Texas and America. More information on IIAH can be found online at [iaah.org](http://iaah.org)

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