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MARKETING AGENCY OF THE MONTH:

**TECHNOLOGY BACKS  
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## MARKETING AGENCY OF THE MONTH



# MEETING CLIENT NEEDS

*Automation is the key that "lets us be an independent agency again"*

By Dennis H. Pillsbury

**"T**hey helped me grow in my position." That's what Milissa Lenahan, vice president-operations and security director at First National Bank in Newtown, Pennsylvania, says about the people at William B. Parry & Son, Ltd., Langhorne, Pennsylvania. You

couldn't ask for a better endorsement. That's the kind of statement you hear from many of the clients of this fifth-generation agency. And that's why Parry & Son boasts an extremely high retention rate and a growing book that primarily comes from referrals.

"I've been with the bank since 1983 and moved to my current position in 2002," Milissa points out. "When I came to this position, I needed to learn the insurance program that had been

established. The people at Parry & Son sat down with me and talked me through our insurance coverages—property, casualty and bonds. Insurance gets complicated and expensive. But they were there for me every step of the way and I never got the sense that they were there just to make a commission.

"In fact, we were very concerned about identity theft after attending several seminars and hearing about



*The Parry & Son team holding the "mascot" for the industry's Real Time initiative. From left: Jena-Michele Lee, Sally L. Scheer, Jennifer D. Parry, Lisa Parry Becker, Blake Parry, CPCU, CIC, Janice Parry, and Ryan J. Parry.*

e-risk exposures," Milissa continues. "Parry worked with us to find coverage and when a corporate identity theft package became available that could become part of our bank insurance program, the Parry people brought it to our attention. This approach saved us quite a bit of money, although I'm sure the agency could have made more in commission by selling us a stand-alone policy. But they've

always put the bank's interests first. It is because of that relationship that I switched my personal insurance to them."

The agency was founded in 1905 by William B. Parry, the great-grandfather of the current agency president, William B.K. Parry Jr. (Blake), CPCU, CIC. It was founded to provide fire and theft coverages to the farms and small businesses in Bucks County, Pennsylvania.

William's son, Henry C. Parry, expanded the agency by insuring some of the first automobiles.

William B.K. Parry, along with his son, Blake, continued the expansion of the agency through the acquisition of several local agencies. Blake has been president of the agency since 1987. His daughter, Lisa Parry Becker, joined the agency in 1998 after earning an M.S. degree from Northwestern University and a B.A. from William Smith College. His son, Ryan, joined the agency in 2003 after a career in information technology and business analysis for both domestic and international trading desks at Fidelity Investments. Their cousin, Jennifer Parry, left the mortgage business and joined in 2007. She was licensed just this past summer.

Although each generation changed some of the coverages offered by the agency, as well as the technological underpinnings, one thing has remained the same: The focus is on providing consultative services to every client and developing a long-term relationship. "We seek to put the needs of our clients, our community and the companies we represent first," Blake says. "In the long run, the results are better for everyone."

Lisa adds: "We underwrite every risk before we write it. We go out and inspect every property. I learned that from my dad, who took me along with him on several inspection tours. I remember one of the first inspection tours we took together. We inspected 18 properties. It started out with a mobile home filled with about 50 cats, (we didn't write that one) and ended at an author's house (we wrote that one)."

"It's not worth one risk to jeopardize our relationship with our carriers," Blake explains. "We actually have walked away from accounts. It's nice to be in the position as a 100-year-old agency where we can make that kind of decision. We focus on the profitability of every account that we write."

### **Automation is the key**

"We've been able to stay customer-focused and meet carrier requirements because of automation," Lisa says. "That's been the competitive edge for our agency. We utilize download for personal and commercial lines and are completely dependent on real-time connectivity. Last year, we went completely paperless in personal lines and small commercial. The operational efficiency we are



achieving is allowing us to perform as an independent agency again.”

Lisa admits that the move to a fully automated, paperless environment was not entirely planned. The agency is using The Agency Manager from Applied Systems and has been on the system for more than 18 years. When Lisa joined the agency, Blake suggested that she find out more about the system while she continued to do everything else.

“I got involved with ASCnet (Applied Systems Client Network) at the local level right away,” Lisa remembers. “The education that they provided was amazing. So I went to an annual conference and was exposed to the Interface Committee just when Real Time was being rolled out. I thought it was really great and later wound up chairing the committee. I looked at how we were servicing our accounts and quoting

*At right: Kimbra Stanfield works off-site. She has been with the agency for 10 years and proofs commercial renewals and assists with administrative details.*

*Below (from left in outdoor photo): Milissa J. Lenahan, Vice President-Operations and Security Director for The First National Bank and Trust Co. of Newtown, with Lisa Parry Becker and Blake Parry.*



new business. I realized that this was just what we were looking for.

“Part of the automation draw stems from a shift in agency business. “When I started, our book was 60% personal lines,” Lisa recalls. “When Ryan came on board, he focused on commercial, and now that represents 60% of our book. This increase in business accounts strained our ability to provide the kind of service that was our hallmark.

“We were reaching a critical point where it was becoming difficult to maintain our service-oriented culture. Our people were working nonstop, just to keep up.”

Blake points out: “Our approach is labor intensive. If you’re going to inspect every property and carefully underwrite the risk, it’s going to take time. But it is worth it. We had proof of that with an account that we had written for 50 years. It was a tree surgeon and a new CFO had come on board who had a relationship with another agency. We lost the account to a standard company that was viewing the market through the rose-tinted glasses so popular in the soft market.

“Just recently, that standard insurer no longer thought tree surgeons were such a good risk and the firm came back to us and asked if we could help out. We have a strong relationship with the surplus lines market and that market was able to provide coverage because they knew us and knew the account. We’ve established a level of trust with our carriers and with our clients that is unparalleled. So it’s a 50-year-plus relationship with a minor hiccup. But we’re pretty sure they’ll be with us for a long time to come.”

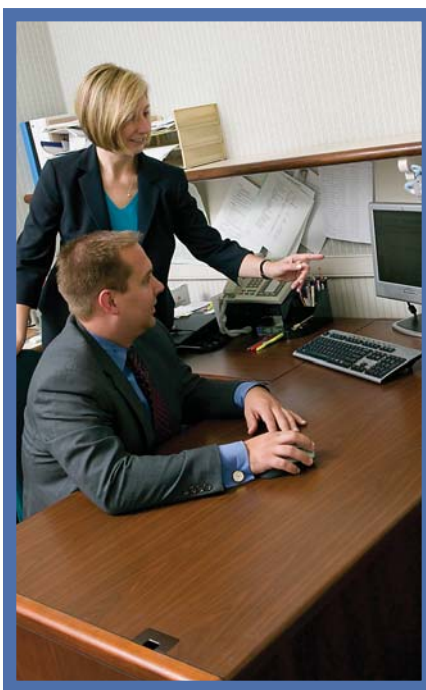
Lisa points out that the agency has only seven people, not all of whom are full time, and handles nearly 1,500





From left, Ryan Parry and Blake Parry watch as Dwight Ely, the owner of one of their commercial clients, Ely Farm Products, makes cheese.

Lisa Parry Becker and Ryan Parry provide service to many of their clients through the Internet.



accounts. "We couldn't service our current clients well without automation. To say nothing of the fact that we also are out there trying to grow the business organically. Before, we were growing through acquisition," she adds. "But we have pretty much exhausted that route and are focusing on internal growth."

### A friendly environment

Parry & Son has created a relationship with clients and carriers that is based on an ethic of integrity that fits very well with their Quaker upbringing. "Our companies and our clients know that we can be trusted to do the right thing for them," Lisa says. "Quaker values are very much a part of how we operate our agency. It is because of this level of trust that we have been successful in cross-selling personal and commercial lines. Milissa Lenahan is not the only person who decided to move their personal lines business to us because of the service we provide to their businesses."

Adding veracity to this level of trust is the fact that Parry & Son

has a long history of supporting the local community. Four generations of Parrys have served on the George School Board and three generations have attended the school.

George School is a coeducational boarding and day school for students in grades 9 through 12 that was founded in 1893 by Quakers. It is known for high academic standards in an atmosphere characterized by respect for the individual, honesty and cooperation.

In addition to service at the George School, agency members also serve the community and industry in a variety of other endeavors. Blake is on a bank board and recently completed a 26-year term on a nursing home board. Lisa is a director of ASCnet and co-chairs the industry Real Time Download Campaign. Ryan is involved with a number of nonprofit organizations.

### Industry recognition

The agency was recognized by the IIABA as a Best Practices agency in 2007. "Meeting agents



*The family (from left): Jennifer D. Parry, Lisa Parry Becker, Janice Parry, Blake Parry and Ryan J. Parry.*

*Lisa, Blake and Ryan stand in front of the 1812 Philadelphia Meeting House that was moved and reconstructed on the George School campus in 1974. All three are alumni of the school and have served on the school board as well.*



from around the country who are part of that group was very helpful," Blake points out. "We confirmed with that group that our numbers are where they should be. It has given us a broader perspective. It's much easier to talk to agents from around the country since we aren't in a competitive situation."

Lisa continues by noting that it is the agency's relationship with its companies that has produced the greatest rewards for the agency and its clients. "We recently had a claim with National Grange. The wife of a client was released from the hospital and moved to a hospital bed in her living room. A nurse from the insurance company came and made certain she was properly taken care of. She had her moved to a more comfortable bed. That's the kind of service we get from our companies because of our focus on profitability."

"And our reputation precedes us whenever we call on a prospect and, oftentimes, the prospects are calling us after they've had a problem with their current carrier," Lisa continues. "We receive those calls, usually after a claim, from people asking for our help in dealing with their online carrier. We try to help and then it's not a big step to get them to move to an agency company."

## Conclusion

Parry & Son is an agency that makes it clear how technology can be used to improve client service and make the agency more personal. As Lisa points out, "We're able to meet with our clients more often, assist with their claims when they arise, and provide them with quotes from several companies if that's what they want. We try to have them renew with the current carrier because of the advantages inherent in having a long track record with one company, but we do show them other quotes."

To which Blake adds somewhat ruefully: "Technology has also allowed us to communicate with the younger generation. We have clients we have never spoken to. It's all done through e-mail. Communication has changed drastically since my dad and I were binding accounts on cocktail napkins."

We at *Rough Notes* are proud to recognize William B. Parry & Son as our Marketing Agency of the Month. By embracing technology and showing us how it can be best used to enhance service to clients, companies and the community, the agency deserves the highest accolades. ■