

DOING THE RIGHT THING

Travelers brings enthusiastic young people into the industry via InVEST

By Dennis H. Pillsbury

Among the thousands of people I have spoken to in this industry, only a handful or two actually expected insurance to be their career choice. Even those second- and third-generation agents often tried something else before going into the family business, often with some initial reluctance. Perhaps more interesting, however, is the fact that the vast majority of these people say they're very happy working in this industry for a variety of reasons. The most often cited include:

- You have a real opportunity to help people.
- You can specialize in any area that interests you.
- The opportunities are virtually unlimited.
- You can have a positive impact on your community.
- You're always learning something new about the insurance business or your client's business.

While this represents only a small sampling, it is clear that this really is an industry that offers something for everyone. So why aren't more young people eager to have careers in the insurance business? Why do so many people still consider the industry to be stodgy and boring, despite a plethora of information to the contrary?

Probably because we don't do a very good job of telling our story. Insurance rarely is part of the curricula at the high school or community college level.

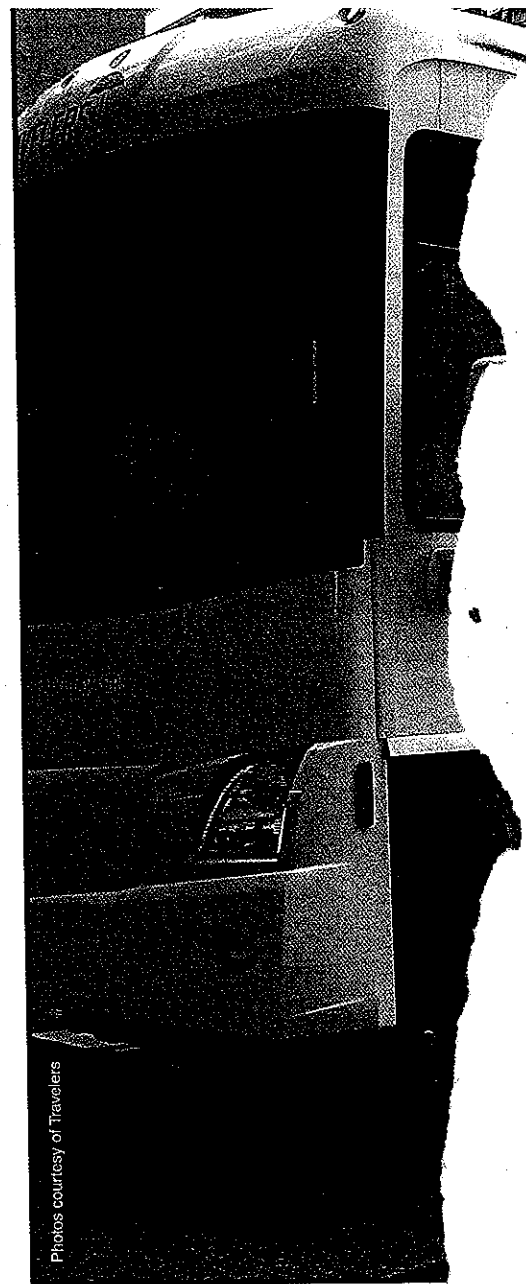
Travelers Insurance is determined to change that.

Walking the walk

Every year, Travelers brings young people who are taking the InVEST course at Hartford, Connecticut-area high schools in for a Job Shadow Day. It is an enormous undertaking. This year, it involved more than 65 high school students and some 33 Travelers employees, including three InVEST students who are working at Travelers as paid interns, several teachers from high schools and community colleges who are interested in starting up an InVEST program, and yours truly.

Avery Fusick, an InVEST intern who works with Director of Field Management Neal Montgomery, performed yeoman service helping to organize the Job Shadow Day, as well as hosting the event on the day itself. So, right from the start, the high school students were dealing with one of their peers as well as meeting a host of people from older generations, each of whom was excited about his or her job.

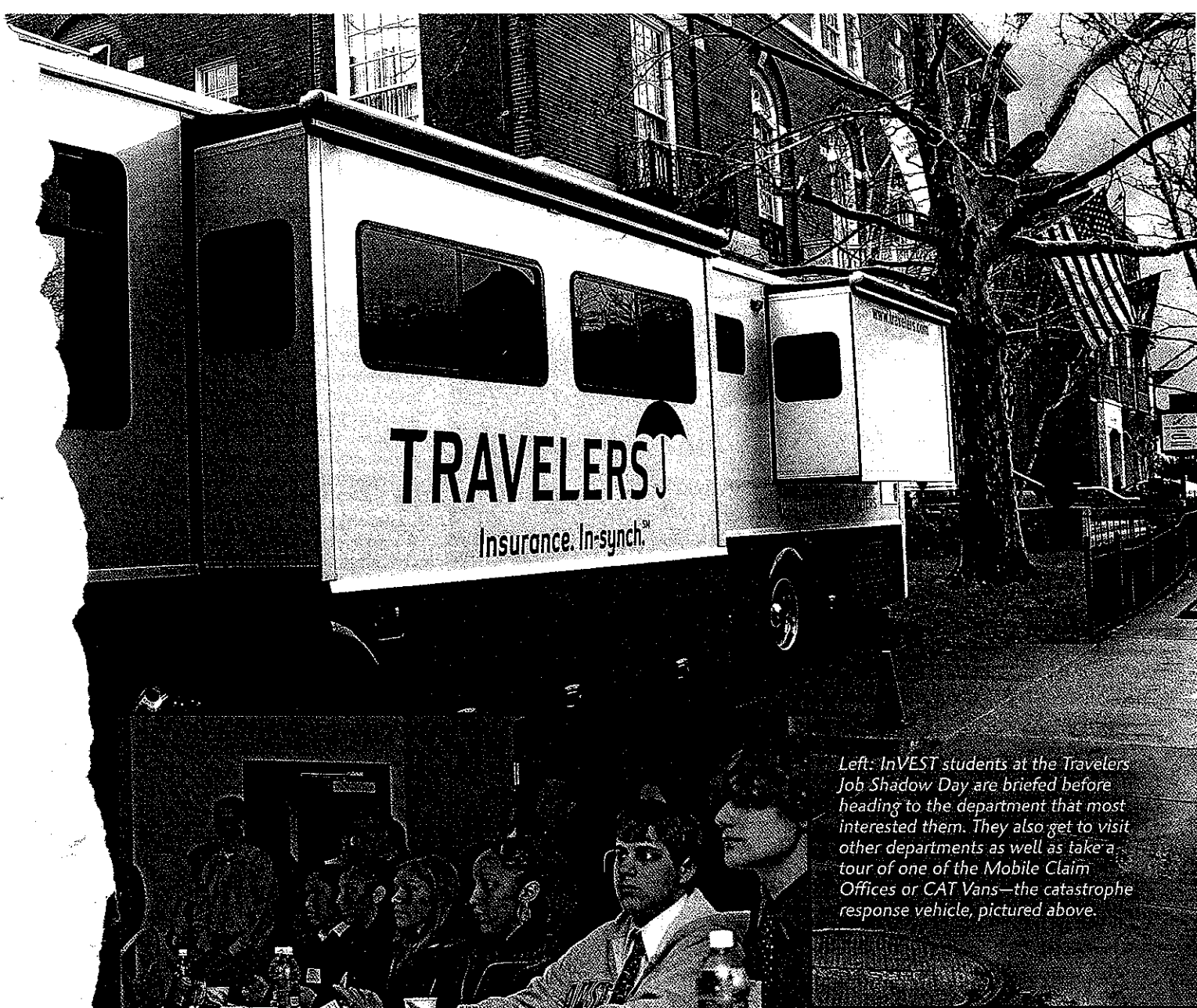
Well before the Job Shadow Day, the high schoolers are asked which areas of insurance interest them most and then Travelers divides the students into groups that shadow an underwriter or an actuary or an investment guru or a...well, you get the idea. The students not only see what the person or persons do in their job, but actually get their hands dirty. They are invited to sit down at the computer and determine a rate for a specific submission under the careful guidance of the mentor from Travelers. They also get to visit other departments within Travelers so they get both a micro and a macro picture of what is involved.



Photos courtesy of Travelers

One of the highlights of the day is the tour of one of the Mobile Claim Offices or "CAT Vans"—the catastrophe response vehicle. One of the regular drivers is on hand to talk about the van's travels and its capabilities. He talks about the fact that the van is in place right after a catastrophe hits so Travelers people can help policyholders affected by the catastrophe.

After Hurricane Ike last year, the driver reported that he drove the van to Texas first where Ike made landfall and then traveled up through the Midwest as the winds and rain left millions of people homeless.



Left: InVEST students at the Travelers Job Shadow Day are briefed before heading to the department that most interested them. They also get to visit other departments as well as take a tour of one of the Mobile Claim Offices or CAT Vans—the catastrophe response vehicle, pictured above.

The van features triply redundant wireless systems that are designed to work when local and even statewide communications systems have been compromised. So, van personnel can access an insured's information on the spot. Because of that, Travelers insureds who were devastated by the disaster were able to receive advances immediately that they could use for emergency shelter and clothing. The equipment on the van has the ability to issue debit cards so the insureds don't have to worry about dealing with a check from an out-of-state bank.

Let's not forget that these high school students represent a generation that identifies helping people as one of the goals they want to achieve at their jobs. The InVEST classes show them some of the ways that insurance can help people, but you could tell just by looking at their reaction to the CAT Van's adventures that they had never really considered just how many people are helped, sometimes in a very short period of time.

Suddenly, insurance changes from "a possible job after graduation if I can't find anything else" to a potential career opportunity.

A one-day show, a 365-day commitment

The Job Shadow Day, which begins with a breakfast, compliments of Travelers, finishes with a lunch from the host. Neal and Avery wrap things up with appropriate thanks and with a reminder of just how varied the insurance profession can be. "There are only two professions that I can think of where there isn't a job for you in the insurance industry—astronaut and ballet dancer," Neal points out and challenges the students to come up with another example. He meets each



24/8—A Success Story

Thanks to InVEST, Jessica Benson with Travelers Event Management team, who recently turned 24, boasts eight years of experience. This comes in pretty handy when she has to deal with hotel management or catering personnel and they start to underestimate her abilities because of her youthful appearance.

Jessica took the InVEST course because she wanted a business course and had heard that it was a good learning experience and a lot of fun. The course at East Hartford High School was and still is taught by Ralph Gray, who also was Avery's teacher.

Ralph was a successful businessman who retired early and changed careers to share his wisdom with young people just starting out. The InVEST program fit perfectly with his idea. It gave students a chance to run their own businesses while still in high school. The students who took the InVEST course were much better prepared to enter the job market or to head off to college.

Adding to the attraction of a course that let students learn by doing was the fact that Travelers and other insurance businesses in the area offered paid internships. Jessica was preparing to go to college and wanted some business experience before enrolling. She started working at Travelers after school when she was 16 and still in school and then worked full time during the summers.

Due to a family situation, the opportunity for Jessica to return for her junior year of college was no longer an option. However, with two years of college experience and a solid working background at Travelers, she felt confident entering the workforce. A Travelers marketing unit took advantage of the opportunity to hire her full time. She became involved in many aspects of Connecticut's PGA Tour event now called the Travelers Championship. Jessica recalls, "I was coordinating the travel and hospitality events for guests attending the tournament. The InVEST internships helped prepare me for taking on these exciting new challenges. I was very well trained and, most important, confident that I could do the job."

Following this experience, Jessica transferred into Travelers Event Management unit. In addition to coordinating accommodations for the Travelers Championship, she also handles meetings with agents, making certain that facilities are available for agents and senior Travelers staff, as well as working with the catering department on meals and other functions.

In addition to all that work involves, she is also pursuing a degree in hospitality and is active in the community. She serves on the board of the East Hartford School-Business Partnership and is involved with numerous charities.

Not bad for someone who is the ripe old age of 24. Imagine what she'll be doing when she hits 30!

challenge with an example of a job right in the Travelers home office. Once again, you can see the wheels turning as some of the students consider the potential opportunities offered by the insurance industry.

Of course, a one-day event, no matter how well done, does not a convert make. For most teenagers, insurance is simply seen as a financial impediment to their desire to start driving. They don't understand insurance—and they don't like it. However, with knowledge comes understanding and certainly a diminution of antipathy. And that is the first goal of InVEST—to provide students with a basic understanding of insurance and its role in society.

Travelers is a strong supporter of the InVEST program, providing leadership and resources to any school system that is near a Travelers office and wants to start a program. And Neal, as a champion for the program, goes one step further by actually seeking out teachers who are interested in furthering financial literacy for their students, as well as working with agents' groups across the country. It has been an excellent partnership.

By the time the students attend the Job Shadow Day, they already understand the basics of insurance. They have seen the consequences of poor driving decisions and gotten a lesson in frequency and severity. (Our teacher uses dice for this lesson. Two and twelves represent high severity, low frequency losses.) The students have been running their own "agency" or working in an "insurance company" in the classroom and see how insuring poor drivers can impact their own bottom line.

Classes include guest speakers from Travelers, as well as representatives from local agencies or other insurance companies. The speakers not only talk about their jobs, but involve the students in decision making. Some people actually discuss open cases and ask the students how they would handle the situation. (They, of course, don't reveal the names of the people involved in the cases to protect their privacy.)

Neal sums up the reason for Travelers' continuing support for the program. "It helps students understand the depth and breadth of careers within our industry. In fact, it does even more than that. It generates an excitement for the industry and helps to attract some of the best and the brightest into insurance, rather than entering other fields. In the continuing War for Talent, it gives us a very important leg up on the competition." ■