

Profile

A professional portrait of Joan Smith, a woman with dark hair and bangs, wearing a black blazer over a white collared shirt. She is smiling slightly and looking towards the camera. The background is a soft, out-of-focus grey.

SUPPLY-CHAIN MANAGEMENT

Three experts discuss how to augment resources, streamline processes, and synchronize the chain of command **p.60**

CUSTOM TECHNOLOGIES

Companies and executives dedicated to integrating enterprise solutions to enhance the competitive edge **p.22**

JOAN SMITH

Executive director of Loaves & Fishes Centers—The Meals-On-Wheels People leads the organization into its 40th year of defining the entrepreneurial spirit in nonprofit service



Jack Blair, Jr. (left) and Greg Blair (right), partners of Nottingham Insurance, stand with Tom Troy (center), executive vice president of Sharbell Development Corp. outside Robbinsville Town Center, a project developed by Sharbell and insured by Nottingham.

JACK BLAIR, JR. & GREG BLAIR

FOURTH-GENERATION PARTNERS OF NOTTINGHAM INSURANCE ARE STRENGTHENING BUSINESS THROUGH CLIENT-CENTRIC PRACTICES

by Brigitte Yuille

Community and family are among the key ingredients to Nottingham Insurance's decades of success. The full-service, independent insurance agency was founded in the rural community of Hamilton Square, New Jersey in 1917 by Major Voorhess Nutt, with the intention of helping farmers with their insurance needs. More than 90 years later, the company has become a premier midsize insurance agency overseen by two of Nutt's great-grandchildren: Jack Blair, Jr. and Greg Blair. Additionally, a third partner, Peter Toft, oversees a satellite office in Yardley, Pennsylvania.

"We have our own respective family, but we also have our insurance family here at this agency," says Jack, who sees that being a family business is one of the company's biggest strengths.

Nottingham Insurance currently consists of four distinct divisions: commercial and business, individual and family, group benefits, and life and annuity insurance. It assists 7,500 clients and represents 20 insurance companies. The principals have withstood the turbulent recessionary period while maintaining their Best Practices Agency pedigree, a program associated with the Independent Insurance Agents and Brokers of America. This distinction places Nottingham in the top 190 agencies in the country.

The company maneuvered its way through the economic downturn by focusing on continued growth and strategic diversification. As the economy nosedived, many businesses reduced their expenses or went out of business. "What was a \$50,000 account

NOTTINGHAM INSURANCE

*Location: Hamilton
Square, NJ and
Yardley, PA*

Employees: 33

*Area of specialty:
Commercial, busi-
ness, individual, fam-
ily, group, life and
annuity insurance*

*Average annual
sales: \$40 million+*

is now a \$25,000 account,” Jack says. “And maybe that \$25,000 account is no longer in business.” The agency was able to insulate itself from the economic turmoil because of a strategy set in place in 1994, when Jack and Greg, the fourth generation, took over the family business. They knew they needed to find other revenue streams to provide additional growth and stability during tough times. Their

a very small agency with a very narrow focus,” Jack explains. The year was 1983, and the agency had five employees and annual sales of \$1.7 million. Now, the company has 33 employees and sales in excess of \$40 million. Jack attributes its success to hard work, fostering strong business relationships, following solid business practices laid out by his father, and being well-positioned to take advantage of new busi-

“We view ourselves as our clients’ advocates and tell our clients that we are their business partners who will help them manage their insurance and risk-management programs.”

Jack Blair, Jr., Partner

diversification plans started with the formation of the group-benefits division in 1994, and the life and annuities division in 2005.

“We also recognized the need to add new producers who could generate new sales and business opportunities,” says Greg, who manages the sales force. “Our focus has been to target specialty casualty markets and broaden our geographical reach. We are also using some new products to find new clients and opportunities. While our business growth has been slight, we are increasing our client base and feel we are well-prepared for the future.” The partners take pride in keeping costs down, making few adjustments, and maintaining their current workforce. “We haven’t grown a lot, but we haven’t had to let anyone go either,” Greg says.

Jack and Greg are skilled at overcoming challenges. Since taking over the company 20 years ago, they’ve had to grow and maintain positive relationships with clientele while keeping sight of the company’s values and culture. “When we came into business, it was

ness opportunities as they come. While the principals say they are not the type of agency that typically grows via acquisition, they are open to deals that are in line with their strategic goals. In fact, as many other businesses downsize, Nottingham’s principals are actively engaged in adding another agency.

This anticipated growth is just the beginning of the company’s efforts to prepare for an economic recovery. Jack and Greg are taking advantage of growing markets, such as health benefits, and are keeping a close eye on the federal government’s health-plan developments. They have pushed past their comfort zone and have plans to spread out their business geographically. Nottingham is prepared to create new business by continuing to pursue prospective clients and by utilizing their supplier partners to help it succeed. “We have some insurance companies that we have represented for more than 80 years. Those relationships run deep and give us the ability to write some great business,” Jack says. The agency has also added new, young producers with various specialties and has seen a great return on its efforts.

Throughout the years, the company's principals have become intricately involved in their hometown community. They sit on no less than eight nonprofit boards at any given time, and they take on leadership roles and head major community projects. For example, they were involved with tearing down the New Jersey home of Megan Kanka—the namesake for “Megan’s Law”—and building a serene park called Megan’s Place in her memory. Another community-outreach project involved building a ballpark for physically challenged children.

have established trust and loyalty among their clients, employees, and community. This, Jack says, is a testament to the company’s longevity and is what sets it apart from its competitors. [P]

“We view ourselves as our clients’ advocates and tell our clients that we are their business partners who will help them manage their insurance and risk-management programs,” Jack says. Jack and Greg



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