

Broker Words

By Stephen P. Howard, Editor & Publisher



What a night! Each year at the NAILBA annual meeting my wife and I have the great pleasure of sitting with three of our dearest friends, Eugene and Shirlee Cohen and their son Michael, at the Mooers Award dinner. I don't ever seem to have enough time to chat during the event, always hopping up to take a few more pictures of the brokerage industry's elite in all their black tie finery. This year, however, I was away from the table more than usual, as Shirlee usually tries to pry the name of the honoree from me and I truly would make a lousy poker player.

It is with true joy in my heart that I here recognize Eugene Cohen, Eugene Cohen Insurance Agency, Skokie, IL, for being named the 2015 recipient of the Douglas Mooers Award for Excellence, NAILBA's, and the brokerage industry's, highest honor.

After finding varying success in a number of occupations (he once sold watermelons out of a truck), an act of providence led Eugene, then in Cleveland, to begin sales training in 1963, specializing in disability income insurance with Massachusetts Indemnity Life Insurance Company. By 1967 he had become one of the youngest agency managers in company history. He built the agency from a struggling two person office to one of the company's strongest. In 1970 he was transferred to one of the company's flagship offices, in Chicago, with responsibility for managing a dozen agencies across the country. In 1980 the company changed direction and the Eugene Cohen Insurance Agency was born.

From that point on Eugene has been a tireless supporter of the brokerage distribution system. The agency has been a member of both NAILBA and LifeMark Partners for decades. He became a founding member of The Plus Group, a DI focused marketing group, and in 2004 was part of the initial planning and eventual

formation of the International DI Society—receiving their lifetime achievement award in 2011. He has served on countless carrier BGA advisory boards, bringing lessons of the past and vision of the future to myriad insurance company executives.

But in my mind Eugene's greatest industry achievement, on a tediously long list, is the fact that for over 50 years he has diligently helped train, educate and create personal growth in literally thousands of insurance agents--instilling in them not just the necessary components of insurance

sales, but more important, the ethical mandates of integrity and the imperative that service to the greatest benefit of the consumer and his beneficiaries must always come first.

Eugene takes the greatest pride in his family. He and his delightful wife Shirlee have raised three sons to mirror their core beliefs in faith, integrity, a strong work ethic and the responsibility of giving back to the community and to those less fortunate than themselves. The Cohens are active supporters of many charities, among them Glenkirk, an organization that provides services to intellectually

disabled children and adults, the Jewish United Fund of Chicago, the NAILBA Charitable Foundation, Heart Strings, the Muscular Dystrophy Association and the Wounded Warriors program.

As a lengthy list of the yet to be named honoree's achievements was being read from the podium, my eyes were locked on my friends as the realization dawned that it wasn't in fact "some company guy"—Eugene predictably humbly lowered his head, and Shirlee grabbed his arm in delight before turning to admonish "You lied to me!"

I'll cherish that moment to my dying day, and it is with deep gratitude that I thank Eugene Cohen for decades of precious friendship and for his tireless service to our industry and the consumers it is our duty to protect. [SPH]

