



InVest Podcast: Deborah Pickford

Rachael: Hi this is Rachael Newmister with Frederick Mutual Insurance Company and I am here with Deborah Pickford from InVest and she is going to talk today about the InVest program and what it means for the insurance landscape, so I will turn it over to Deborah.

Deborah: Thank you, Rachael. And I want to thank Frederick Mutual for hosting InVest today on this podcast. The one thing that we say about InVest is we are one of the biggest secrets in the industry and we want everyone to know about us. My name is Deborah Pickford. I am the executive director for InVest and I have been in this role almost six years which is amazing. It is a great job and a great opportunity to really help the insurance industry and our agents with staffing and recruitment of talent. We are not a recruiting firm, but I will give you some background on us. What we do and how we have evolved over the years. We started in the 1970s, which is surprising to me, out in Los Angeles. We had an agent in Los Angeles who basically said, "Why are we not teaching insurance literacy to students in high school? It is a product you buy when you are young or you're on your parent's policy? But then you will continue to buy some form of insurance policy probably for the rest of your life. Wouldn't it be a good idea if young people knew what was in that policy, what it did, how to save money, how to effectively use insurance for risk management - all of that?" So, it started out of Los Angeles in 1970s, we are over 50 years old now and we have really evolved to become a big, national program encompassing education, and now doing a lot of workforce development. We are part- InVest is part of the IIAB, but we are our own nonprofit standalone organization which means we raise our own money, do our own programming, spend money, of course we have a board of directors and on our board sit most of the major insurance companies. And then, we have agencies on our board and those groups donate to InVest as well as private donors. We have some computer vendors people that run agent software that are part of our group as well. But we are always looking to cast our net wider in the insurance industry. I have mentioned that we have evolved. We primarily, as I mentioned, started as an insurance education program, and have become working with workforce development more frequently. We have doubled our growth within the past five or six years. We are in almost every state. I will describe a little bit about our program and how it works and what it looks like on a day-to-day basis. InVest, www.investprogram.org, we have an online program with an Etextbook, lots of power points, quizzes, lesson plans for teachers, exams and it is all done online which is very helpful during the pandemic. We train teachers, we work primarily in high school and community college. We train teachers to use our curriculum - it is a very basic curriculum- and the beauty of our curriculum it is free to any school that wishes to use it. We do not mandate how the curriculum is used. For example, we don't say you have to start at chapter 1 and go all the way to chapter 12. What we say to schools: "Use the materials and the curriculum how it fits best into your existing program," and a lot of business schools or academy of finances find that InVest fits in very nicely with their work. So, we don't mandate anything to them, but we support them, as I said we train teachers; or, even more interesting we like to bring insurance professionals whether agents or people who work for a carrier into that local classroom to do a job day, career fair, or even teach one of the an InVest chapters (101 for example). Now during

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the pandemic, obviously, we didn't have people going into the classroom but what we did do we all got very good at Zoom and Microsoft Teams and we were able to transition very easily to teaching online and that has been the beauty of what we are doing. We teach very basic, as I said insurance 101, careers in insurance all the way down to a section on business insurance. So, we teach all of that on a basic level. But the other thing we really like to do at InVest is to connect people to that local classroom. So, we like bringing in to mentor students, to offer internships to get to know students in the local community and perhaps they are future people that they hire. We have done that very effectively in New York. We have an InVest program in upstate New York for 20 years now. And Dryden Mutual hires from high schools in upstate New York that they work with or from the colleges to come right into work for Dryden Mutual. So, it's a really nice program and is a yearlong program. And they do things beyond the technical insurance courses they do things like preparing people for interviews, how to create an effective LinkedIn profile, dress for success, they bring the students to the Insurance 1 day in Syracuse the state capitol and the invest students host the speakers, they bring them in, they have a luncheon, they host an invest booth. So, what I am painting a picture of is more professional development or skills development even beyond the technical insurance knowledge that they gain while they are in the classroom.

Rachael: Wow that is an excellent explanation of what you guys are doing. And, very comprehensive of all the things you are doing in the community and with these students. So, what would you say are the top needs for the invest program at this stage?

Deborah: I mentioned that we are expanding rapidly, so we always need volunteers. We are almost in every state doing some special projects in MD, CA, OH. I get an email or call a day from a new state or new program who are really looking volunteers to either teach insurance online or in the classroom or to train teachers. So, our number one need is bolstering our volunteers. Second need, obviously, we are a two to three person staff. We are always looking for donations we raise our own money. You can donate online. www/investprogram.org/donate. We are always looking for donations to grow our programming, staff up, and to bring in new and exciting programming in. We are doing a lot of work right now around diversity and inclusion.

In addition to working with high school classrooms and community college classrooms we have been doing a lot of work with community-based organizations that are looking to do workforce training. To that I will mention we have been doing work with a group called LINC: Latinos in the Networking Community and they are based in LA. We did a summer insurance education program with them last year and continue to work with them. And then Chicanos or la Causa in Arizona. We have been doing work with Chicanos por la Causa and they have actually been doing insurance education training for their constituency - a very successful program. We are always looking to reach out to new groups with our programming, new high schools, and have teachers and mentors and, also hearing from companies and agencies who have jobs where we could potentially match our students with jobs, mentorships, and potentially apprenticeships. We have been working on an apprenticeship program as well. So, a great need for volunteers, for donations.

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Then the third thing I will mention is spreading the word about InVest. I said it at the beginning of the podcast: we are the best kept secret in the industry. We really do not want to be a secret, you know, we want people to know about us. But as important, we would like our insurance professionals to talk about their jobs. Why did you join the insurance industry? Many of us just fell into it but we want insurance professionals to talk about the enthusiasm and excitement that they have in their jobs, the breadth and depth of careers that we have, you can own an insurance agency and be a small business owner, you can lobby in a state capitol as an insurance professional. You could be a marketing person; you could be a communications professional. There are just so many jobs. But I think many young people are unaware of the opportunities that we have in the insurance industry. But not only that, we pay well, we have good benefits, but many of our companies also still offer pensions which is amazing.

So, the final thing about that we also know that the professionals in our industry genuinely care about the careers of young people. I know in my experience most of my supervisor or bosses even if they retired, they'd stay in touch with me. They want to know how my career is going. So, we always have that mentorship and leadership capability within our insurance professionals that will become a lifelong mentor to those young people and really care about those careers.

Rachael: Yes, that is really important and significant. For the volunteers do they have to have a background in insurance?

Deborah: Absolutely do not have to have a background in insurance. Many of our volunteers are teachers, who you know may have purchased an insurance policy but don't know much about it, but they quickly get up to speed. I know that insurance is a daunting topic for many people. You know, it's complicated, but the invest curriculum really provides them very easy to use resources you know with the teacher's guide, the lesson planes, it's very basic 101. So, we will start working with the teacher we may have a professional or someone from invest actually helping to mentor them through that learning process of our curriculum. And then they take it on themselves, and they start teaching so you do not have to be an insurance professional.

Rachael: Okay, that is good to know, and we will definitely put a link for the donations and likewise – do you have a website all the cities and programs?

Deborah: We have a map on our website showing where we are located. Its almost impossible to keep up because we are expanding so quickly. But users can go in and click on the map, they can learn about our curriculum, on our website we host videos of people who have gone through the InVest program. In fact, our current our board chair was an InVest student many years ago in Florida. We think when young people talk about going through the program, what it meant to them, how it changed their thinking about insurance and an insurance career we think that is the best story we can tell.

Rachael: Absolutely. I will link that as well to this podcast. Hopefully we can help you spread the word. We admire what you are doing and Frederick Mutual is invested in what you are doing. So, I appreciate you coming and giving us a great overview of what you are doing and hopefully we can help.

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Deborah: Wonderful and I have to, as a final word, unless you have additional questions, is to talk about the support we are given through the insurance community. We enjoy tremendous support not only thought our companies who donate money, time, and expertise, we enjoy a fantastic reputation. We could not fulfill our mission if it were not for so many people who support us in so many ways. So, we are very grateful for the support of our community as well as the support of our teachers and our insurance leadership. Like I said, we could not fulfill our mission without so many partners who are critical to our success.

Rachael: Yes, its definitely a team effort and so we are thankful for what you are doing and we long to see the results of this in the future.

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