

# Faces of Risk Management:

*William A. Payton*

*The best way to tell the story of URMIA and the growth of the profession is through the voices of our members. In this series, we explore our history through our members' own stories, photos and memories.*

## **Interview with Bill Payton: Establishing URMIA's National Office and hiring an executive director**

**What is your most vivid recollection from your time as URMIA president? Do you have an anecdote you would like to share?**

The board meetings I had attended prior to my term as URMIA president were scheduled for three hours but would last all day. The committee chairs would submit reports but then reiterate the report during the meeting. I vowed we would end our board meetings on schedule. We did away with reviewing the written reports unless there were specific questions from board members. I remember Mary Breighner being very supportive in this endeavor. If a motion was before the board and was dragging on, Mary would call the vote.

We assembled the board and a few chairs in Houston in January 2004 and brought in a consultant to lead us through a strategic planning session.

Glenn Klinksiek had done this a few years before in Chicago, but with the changing of the board there had not been significant traction. This board, however, was determined to follow through (and I had already been elected to a second term before I took office for my first term, so we also had continuity). We had three strategic goals, and we divided the board into three teams. The tables had been shaped in a U formation. I first looked to see where Margaret Tungseth was sitting, and I designated that side as the team dealing with the financial related objectives (developing a multi-year dues structure, setting reserves, etc). Another objective was to develop a logo, and Ellen Shew Holland led that team. I can't remember the third strategic goal.

The board had purpose and was amazing. We emphasized that the vice president had the planning responsibility.

*William A. Payton was risk manager at the University of Missouri-Columbia and president of URMIA in 2003-2005. In 2006, Bill received URMIA's highest honor, the Distinguished Risk Manager award, for his contributions to the profession and the association.*



UNIVERSITY RISK MANAGEMENT &  
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## Where was the Annual Conference held during your term, and who was conference chair?

The conference was held in Anchorage the first year I was president. The co-chairs were Kevin McGinnis, risk manager from Texas A&M, and Julie Baecker Lageson, risk manager from University of Alaska. More about this conference later.

The conference in my second term was in Charleston, SC. Hurricane Ophelia was coming up the coast, and it changed our gala event from an outside venue on a plantation to the campus of the Citadel.

## Were you president the year we first went from an all-volunteer management organization to retaining outside management?

We had retained an outside management firm called Association Resources two years before I became president. My first year was the third year of a three-year contract. I remember that Larry Stephens and I flew to Hartford to meet with them, and when they picked us up at the hotel, Larry jokingly introduced himself as Bill and he introduced me as Larry. He, of course, told them the truth, but the rest of the time we were there, they were confused. They had some sound advice for us, such as strategic planning, but the relationship never developed between us.

When we went to the 2004 conference in Anchorage (over Labor Day weekend), one of the agenda items was the contract renewal with Association Resources. They had submitted a contract for us with a three-year term; we modified that to a one-year with annual extensions. I met with them, and they rejected it as their policy was only for three-year renewals. I brought it back to the board; we discussed it and came up with some compromises (not sure what it was, but it wasn't three years). So the board reached consensus on our counter, and I remember standing in front of the board and saying, "You know what scares me about this contract? I am afraid they will accept it. What would we have to do to go on our own?" That was it! Larry Stephens or Mary Breighner went to the writing board and started making notes. Larry thought we could be located on the Indiana University campus as an auxiliary unit. We agreed that we weren't a lobbying organization, so that would be okay. By the time we left Anchorage, we knew we were going to go on our own. The board was terrific. Not one member was sitting idly by.

I remember standing in front of the board and saying, "You know what scares me about this contract [to continue URMIA being managed by an outside firm]? I am afraid they will accept it. What would we have to do to go on our own?" That was it! Larry Stephens or Mary Breighner went to the writing board and started making notes.

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**URMIA's 2011 Annual Conference, Portland, OR**  
Bill Payton with Joyce Fred, Tulane University, at the URMIA President's Reception.



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**URMIA's 2011 Annual Conference, Portland, OR**  
Gary Langsdale, The Pennsylvania State University, and Bill Payton at URMIA's Annual Conference Opening Reception.

We didn't tell Association Resources while we were in Anchorage, but we told them soon after. They scoffed and said we would never be ready by the end of the year (less than four months away). They also said that we violated our contract (we did) because we didn't give them enough notice. I had several conversations with them, and they finally acquiesced.

Larry advertised in Bloomington for an assistant executive director, and Mary Dewey, director of risk management at the University of Vermont, and I flew in and interviewed the candidates, offered Jenny Whittington a job, and the rest (as they say) is history. On a side note, Mary and I flew into Indianapolis and met at the airport. Larry had given us directions to our hotel in Bloomington, something like "turn left after you come down the big hill." We missed the turn and when we went back to make the turn, Mary looked up the way we had come and said, "That's not a hill."

I can tell you it was both exhilarating and scary as we went through the process, but look where URMIA is today.



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