

MAY 27, 2004



Officials of Attorneys' Title Guaranty Fund during its 40-year history have included (from left) Norman J. Pollock of Marengo, Thomas A. LeChien of Belleville, Stanley B. Balbach of Urbana and Herbert C. Steinmetz Jr. of Aurora.

ATG to mark 40th year with reception at Abbey

Attorney's Title Guaranty Fund will continue celebrating its 40th anniversary during a reception from 5 to 7 p.m. Thursday, June 17, at The Abbey on Lake Geneva — the opening event of the ISBA Annual Meeting.

ATG was incorporated on Aug. 6, 1964, by 259 shareholders. Its initial headquarters was the Urbana office of Stanley B. Balbach, whose foresight had generated a 12-year campaign to develop interest in the concept of a title company in which lawyers would serve lawyers.

During an American Bar Association Junior Bar Conference in 1952, Balbach learned about bar-related title insurance from a trustee of the Florida fund, and he wondered, "why not in Illinois?"

With the help of his law partners, Charles Webber and Richard L. Thies, who went on to become president of the ISBA, Balbach began raising money, contacting

colleagues in other counties and speaking at meetings around the state.

Strong supporters such as Peter Ferracuti of LaSalle County, John Satter of Livingston County, Richard Hart of Franklin County and Wilbur Capps of Hancock County joined Balbach, Thies and Webber at the first ATG board meeting on Aug. 19, 1964.

The initial title insurance policy was issued in October 1964 by Robert Scott of Rock Island, and in March 1965, Enos Phillips of Urbana issued the first million-dollar policy.

After steady growth, despite lean market periods and intense competition from large and small title insurers, ATG member Rick Heavner of Decatur wrote the fund's one-millionth policy in late 1993 as the 30th anniversary neared.

Peter J. Birnbaum, who was elected president in 1992, had joined ATG in 1981. At that time, the fund's four employees in Chicago and 12 in Champaign handled a few hundred transactions each month.

Today, ATG has more than 3,700 shareholder members, 260 employees in a dozen locations, and an annual pace of about 100,000 policies. Its five thriving subsidiaries are The Judicial Sales Corp., Capital Funding Corp., ATG Trust Co. (formerly Guaranty Trust), NLI Title and FSBO Wisconsin Homes.

Only 10 years the millionth title policy was issued, ATG recorded its two-millionth when Harry DeBruyn of Palos Park insured a new home in Chicago's far south Mt. Greenwood neighborhood.

In recent weeks, ATG has launched an Internet-based software program to help attorney-agents produce and track necessary real estate transaction documents, and has announced the opening of a regional office in Wheaton next month.