

Commissioner's Column
NCBAA
December Issue

On Feb. 29, I announced that I would not seek a seventh term as insurance commissioner, and that I will retire in January. After what will be 24 years, the time has come for me to move on to other things and let the next generation take over.

It was a hard decision to leave this job that I have loved for more than two decades. I have seen so much during my tenure and I've been a part of a truly wonderful profession and industry. It has been my pleasure to serve you all these years and there is a lot about this job I will miss.

I can tell you, it's changed a lot since I first took office in 1985. The department had rotary telephones, and the one computer terminal to the state's mainframe rarely worked. We had only two IBM mag card typewriters, only one of which worked. And our accountants had adding machines and mechanical calculators. I had my work cut out for me, but we made some improvements over the years.

And the bail bonding industry is a prime example of how this Department has evolved, especially during the last half of my tenure.

In 1994, the Department introduced continuing education credits, with all licensed bail bondsmen having to complete at least 10 credit hours. A few years later, we lowered the credit requirements to six hours and now bail bonding licensees are only required to have three hours of continuing education credit.

We've also made many significant licensing changes over the last 24 years. In 1997, we introduced the surety bail bond license. Later that same year, the Department established qualifications for preclicensing and continuing education course providers. The Department also developed a permanent license system to replace the annual paper licenses; created picture identifications for licensees; mandated criminal history checks for applicants; and eliminated the requirement of having surety bondsmen register with clerks of court annually.

In 2001, the Department updated its regulatory oversight when licensing functions transferred from our Special Services Division to the Agent Services Division. The next year, we solicited the industry for its participation in developing questions for license examination.

Our partnerships continued to grow, and in 2006, we partnered with AOC to create the Electronic Bondsmen Registry. Last year we assigned National Producer Numbers (NPN) to all bail bondsmen.

Most recently in 2003, our Agent Service Division worked to streamline the monthly reporting process by eliminating surety bail bondsmen monthly reports. The Division also began outsourcing the bail bond licensing exam administration to Pearson VUE. We were also proud to introduce a new, wallet-sized, hard-plastic badge license that

bears the licensee's NPN number, name and photo. These license badges came after much interest from the industry, and should be helpful to not only license holders, but also your clients.

We've come a long way from my first few months taking office all those years ago. I couldn't have done it without a great staff and the incredible support from the industry and all of you. I've been told that I am now the third longest-serving insurance commissioner in the nation's history and the third longest-serving state elected official. Now is the time to move on. Serving you has been an honor and a privilege, and I thank you.