

# Building Bonds

INCOMING NAMIC CHAIRMAN SAYS RELATIONSHIPS HAVE BEEN AND ALWAYS WILL BE KEYS TO HIS SUCCESS.

 LINDSAY ROBISON

What got you to where you are today?

That was one of the initial questions posed by his first mentee when **Paul Ehlert** got started in **Germania Farm Mutual Insurance Association's** mentoring program. For the Germania president and CEO and incoming NAMIC chairman, the answer was easy. Relationships.

The relationship that started it all was the one he had with his father, WJ. Ehlert. He practiced law in Brenham, Texas, Germania's hometown. Ehlert recalls being a young boy spending Saturday mornings sitting behind the reception desk at his father's law office. Because the normal receptionist didn't work weekends, Ehlert would answer the phone and transfer calls to his father and the other attorneys.

The bond built during those Saturday mornings led Ehlert to follow in his father's footsteps ... with a slight detour. "I actually started out pre-med," he explains. "My older brother was going to school to be a lawyer, and I figured the both of us would be one too many in the law office. But he changed career paths and I switched over."

Ehlert's career-path switch led to a quarter-century-long tenure practicing what he calls "a-little-bit-of-everything law."

"In a small town like Brenham [with a current population of more than sixteen thousand people], you have to," he says. "I was working in real estate, probate, and family law."

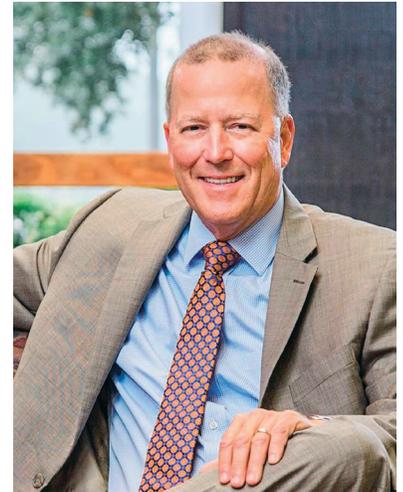
What does more than 25 years in law have to do with insurance or his tenure with Germania, you might ask?

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*"A piece of advice I always give my mentees is 'Pick your battles and never burn bridges.'"*

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It was Ehlert's role as an attorney that fostered a relationship with Germania. Ehlert's practice included some defense work for the company, mostly on the property side of the business. He also served as Germania's outside general counsel for a handful of years. During that time, a family friend who worked



for Germania asked Ehlert if he'd ever thought about joining the staff full time.

"I said, 'Ask me again in two years when I have my kids through college,'" Ehlert recalls.

He joined Germania as executive vice president in July 2004. That following January, the company appointed him first vice president. He took over as president in July 2011.

It was not just the relationships Ehlert had with Germania and its employees that enticed him to the industry, it was the industry's core principles. "I like to think of myself as a people person," he says, "and insurance is a people business."

## Small Town Relationships

Brenham, Texas, home to Paul Ehlert and Germania Farm Mutual Insurance Association, is still a small town, even though Ehlert says "we're a lot closer to Houston than we used to be as it continues to grow."

Despite the big-city creep, small-town relationships are still important, and it shows in Ehlert's involvement in the community – even prior to his tenure with Germania. He served on the Chamber of Commerce board, the Economic Development Foundation, and every available hospital board.

"That is what you do," he says, "being part of a small town."

He's put the same kind of effort into the insurance community, and not just with NAMIC. He is the chairman of the Texas Association of Mutual Insurance Companies' legislative committee and the vice president of the Association of Fire and Casualty Companies in Texas. 



## MEET CHAIRMAN-ELECT PAUL EHLERT

Ehlert admits, though, that even with the legal counsel connection, full-time insurance industry participation came with a learning curve. "I had a good knowledge of the basics, but there were some things such as reinsurance and credit scoring that I had to pick up on fairly quickly," he recalls, adding that learning the company phone system posed a challenge as well.

A relationship with NAMIC helped speed the learning process. Soon after Ehlert joined Germania, NAMIC staff asked him to join the Federal Affairs Committee. While federal affairs was not as much on his radar as state affairs, Ehlert obliged the inquiry — and he found more than just formal education.

"It opened the door for making a lot of good contacts," he says. "Everybody is willing to share their knowledge. I have had a lot of good mentors."

**During his year as NAMIC chairman, Ehlert plans to share the importance of building bonds with others. "I can go back through my career and list the relationships that have opened doors to the things I have been able to do along the way," he says.**

"The industry is constantly changing," he continues, "and it is changing a lot more rapidly lately. Technology advances during the last ten or fifteen years have been extreme. The tech disruptors such as the Internet of Things and autonomous vehicles are going to continually transform our industry and how we do business. But it still goes back to being a relationship business, a people business." 📍

## Get to Know a Little More About Paul Ehlert

**As a kid, my favorite activity was:** anything outdoors – fishing, playing football, riding bikes.

**I earned my bachelor's degree:** in 1975 and my law degree in 1978, both from the University of Texas.

**The hobby I would pick up if time and money weren't issues would be:** woodworking and building things.

**The NAMIC event(s) I don't miss is/are:** CEO Roundtables and the Annual Convention

**Because:** of the networking and personal development.

**My first mentor was:** my dad;

**He taught me:** almost everything.

**I am looking most forward to being NAMIC chairman because:** of the opportunity to meet and spend time with NAMIC members across the country.

**I think the biggest opportunity for the insurance industry is:** developing our future leaders. Our industry is quickly changing because of the rapid advancements in technology, which make it difficult for companies to remain relevant. Although I believe insurance will remain a people business driven by relationships, we must be willing and able to adapt to the changes technology will drive.

**I think the biggest challenge to the industry is:** failing to adapt to change.

**A skill I would like to master is:** remembering names.

**My family would tell you I am:** stubborn at times. Go figure.

**My favorite book is:** I have not read many books for pleasure, so I cannot say I have a favorite. You do so much reading in the practice of law that I always found things to do in my free time that I enjoyed more than reading. I wait until they make a movie out of a good book.

**The next thing I want to cross off my bucket list is:** another University of Texas national football championship.

**Something that most people don't know about me is:** I love construction work. I worked for a contractor during the summers of my junior and senior years in high school, and then for the next two summers roofed houses with friends.

**I wouldn't be where I am today if it weren't for:** my family, friends, and business relationships. I have been very blessed throughout my life. The relationships I have enjoyed with others have opened several doors for me and have brought me to where I am today. 📍



## Pure Texas

For anyone who knows about football, it's not surprising that the sport is a big part of life in Texas. It's also probably not surprising that Paul Ehlert is an avid Texas Longhorns football fan. In his family, it's been a way of life.

"Let's put it this way, my dad went to Texas, I went to Texas, my wife went to Texas, both of my kids went to Texas, and their spouses went to Texas," he says.

"Unless something goes crazy, my four grandkids will also go to Texas."

"We've tried to make sure the family doesn't marry outside of it," he laughs. "So far, we're doing pretty well. Burnt orange runs pretty deep." 📍