

# A FRIEND TO ALL

*Fraternal Agent of the Year gives back to his community every day*

**T**HE WESTERN DAKOTAS agency office in Spearfish, South Dakota, is well-known in the community as a welcome stop for old friends and new to drop in, say “hello,” and visit awhile. This friendly ambience is due in great part to Hugh E. Hart, district manager of our Western Dakotas Agency, who has been named NMB’s 2005 Fraternal Agent of the Year and the sixth recipient of the William J. Wenger Award.

The award, which was established in 1998, is presented to a National Mutual Benefit district manager or district representative for outstanding service, accomplishment, volunteer contributions to branch and community, and dedication to the fraternal philosophy. It is interesting to note that half of the six recipients of this prestigious award have been from the Western Dakotas Agency. The late Marv Cihak of Philip, South Dakota, was the first recipient. In 2003, Jim Foss of Bismarck, North Dakota, was named Fraternal Agent of the Year and now, for 2005, it’s Hugh Hart.

Recipients of the William J. Wenger Award are nominated by local branch members, who try to keep the nomination a secret. This isn’t always easy, especially if you work in the same office as your nominee. But Ruth Doyen, Hugh’s right hand assistant and secretary of Northern Black Hills Branch 73, somehow succeeded in this endeavor.

Hugh’s daughter, Valerie, was the only person besides Ruth who knew Hugh

was nominated and that he had won. “We kept it a BIG secret!” states Ruth.

After receiving the award, Hugh was so surprised that when asked to say a few words, all he could say was “Thank you . . . thank you . . . thank you.” Valerie says, “Dad was speechless and that’s very unusual for him.” Ruth adds with a touch of humor, “He was speechless, but only for a minute.”

“That was the shock of my life! I had no idea who Anne Rogers (NMB’s manager of fraternal services) was talking about,” exclaims Hugh! “I thought it was going to be someone from Wisconsin.” It wasn’t until he heard Anne say, “Would Hugh Hart and President Yanna please come up here?” that he realized it was him she had been talking about all along.

Hugh became active in volunteering almost 40 years ago, in 1967, shortly after he got married. Up until the time he joined National Mutual Benefit, Hugh’s volunteer efforts were mainly with his church, where he continues to be a very active member today. He currently serves as Eucharistic minister and usher, and he always enjoys getting involved in any of the church work projects that need to be done.

In addition to volunteering at their church, Hugh and his wife, JoAnn, were active with the Boy Scouts for several years while their sons were involved. Hugh even served on the local Boy Scout board in Spearfish.

In 1979, when Hugh first joined the NMB agency in South Dakota as a full-



NMB President George Yanna presents Hugh Hart, 2005 Fraternal Agent of the Year, with the William J. Wenger Award at the Dakotas Fraternal Leadership Seminar.



During the open house welcoming him back to Spearfish and NMB, Hugh and JoAnn Hart visit with Sharon Allard (center), a member of Branch 73.

time district representative, he “really got hooked” on anything that had to do with branch functions. He was very active in both Philip Branch 85 and Northern Black Hills Branch 73 (Spearfish) and rarely missed an activity or helping with community fund-raising efforts.

When he left NMB in 1992 to pursue a new career, Hugh realized how much he missed his volunteer activities with the branches. When the opportunity arose to return to NMB in 2005, once again being able to participate in branch activities played a major role in his decision to return.

After living and working in Arizona for eight years, Hugh and JoAnn are delighted to be back “home.” He says warmly, “I’ve always had a very special place in my heart for NMB and its members in the Dakotas.” Giving back to the people he has always cared so much about is very important to Hugh.

When Hart returned to NMB in April 2005, it didn’t take him long at all to jump right back into branch affairs. Hugh says, “I love everything and anything that has to do with the branch.” Branch 73 members really enjoy having him at their meetings. They appreciate the fact that he doesn’t try to run things

but just settles in as one of the group, sharing ideas.

Since his return, Hugh has been found hard at work at several branch events and fund-raisers. In June 2005, Branch 73 held an open house and ice cream social to welcome Hugh back to Spearfish. They had a great turnout for hot dogs and brats, along with face painting, a balloon man, and a piano man for entertainment. Of course, Hugh had to help out, even though this event was held in his honor.

The next event for the branch was the annual waterslide outing and picnic in July 2005. Hugh was very enthused and wanted to help organize this event. When the group found it was short of workers, Hugh and JoAnn, together with his sister and brother-in-law, who were visiting them, did much of the cooking and serving for almost 300 participants. They cooked from 10 a.m. until 4 p.m. Hugh was in his glory!

But don’t be misled. Branch events aren’t all work and no play for Hugh. He joins in the fun too. At the annual Halloween costume party, Hugh arrived as Elvis and was a big hit with everyone.

Not only is Hugh active in Branch 73 affairs, he volunteers at many branch

functions in the Philip area as well, most recently helping with a game feed. He also tries to attend branch activities in North Dakota when he can, but due to the distance, the weather, and other factors, he doesn’t make it to as many activities as he would like to.

When asked what his favorite branch event has been since his return, Hugh said without hesitation, “We just completed a very, very successful fund-raiser for a 10-year-old boy who needs a kidney transplant.” He was amazed that they were able to raise over \$8,500 (including Matching Funds from NMB) for this family. It was a very rewarding experience for all involved.

This benefit included a soup supper, bingo, and an auction. In addition to calling the bingo numbers, Hugh served as the auctioneer. In fact, Hugh is always ready to serve as the auctioneer at any fund-raiser in the Spearfish area. He recently volunteered his auctioneer skills to help out at both the local Knights of Columbus auction and the Crises Pregnancy Center auction.

Hugh attended auctioneer school in Mason City, Iowa, and says, “That was among some of the greatest times in my life—I loved it!” So, if you ever need an auctioneer, now you know who to call!

Besides branch and church activities, Hugh has jumped back into other areas of community service as well. In addition to the Knights of Columbus, he recently joined the Spearfish Chamber of Commerce. In the past, he was active with the Spearfish Optimist Club.

A true friend to many of the residents in the Spearfish area, Hugh is a most deserving Fraternal Agent of the Year. His fraternal endeavors shine through in all he does as he continues to follow his personal motto of *working together to make a difference.* ♦