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PAUL WINSTON

Editorial Director

A better way to give thanks

In a few days, Americans will celebrate the Thanksgiving Day holiday. Rather than aspire to new heights of culinary excess, I'd like to suggest a different way of giving thanks for our bounty and good fortune and tell you about an insurance agent who is doing just that.

The Thanksgiving Day holiday in the United States is meant to commemorate the pilgrims' celebration of the good harvest of 1621. Without it, the Plymouth Colony would have fared poorly that winter and this country's history would probably be quite different. But somewhere along the way—blame Norman Rockwell perhaps, or Butterball—this event morphed into a day of gluttony.

We're supposed to be commemorating the fact that the original settlers did not starve—not honoring the invention of Pepto-Bismol. What was once a family occasion to eat simple fare that the pilgrims might have consumed is now perverted with such gastronomical bling-bling

as turducken, tofurkey and 30-quart deep fat fryers. (I should know. I have one that sits in the garage 364 days a year.)

The living standard of the majority of Americans is such that they have plenty to eat, but flaunting this fact with Thanksgiving voracity—especially when there remain plenty of Americans who are hungry *every day*—just seems in bad taste.

This Thanksgiving, perhaps a better way to give thanks for our good fortune is to help others who are less fortunate. In our country of 300 million people, about 37 million—35% of them children—live below the federal poverty line, according to the U.S. Census Bureau. Consider, too, this year's special burdens: hundreds of thousands of people displaced by Hurricane Katrina, and the many families facing financial struggles while a breadwinner serves active duty with the armed forces in Iraq.

There is an insurance agent who became so appalled by the problem of hunger in our land

of plenty, and its impact on children, that he formed a charitable organization—People Against Children Starving USA—to address the problem.

Al Singer, president of Singer, Nelson & Charlmers in Teaneck, N.J., formed PACS USA in 1997, after learning that millions of children in this country go to bed hungry every night. It's an embarrassment that most people, including those in government, turn away from.

"The government doesn't want to admit that we have millions of children going to bed hungry," Mr. Singer noted. "Politicians don't want to touch the subject and don't want to publicize this problem around the world. We show starving children in Africa and everywhere else, but not here."

PACS USA raises money to fund U.S. food distribution efforts by Feed the Children, a non-profit relief organization that distributes food and other necessities in communities worldwide afflicted by famine, war, poverty or natural disaster. A contribution of \$5,400 to PACS USA finances one Feed the Children truckload of food—about 35,000 pounds of food provided by major food companies at cost.

Large contributors can choose where their food is delivered, if they wish, enabling them to help needy children in their own communities. Contributors can also help distribute the food to see firsthand the relief their support provides.

In 2005, PACS USA has funded

about 15 truckloads of food, including two to New Orleans.

I admire Mr. Singer's tenacity. I have witnessed his efforts, for example, during the annual Insurance Leadership Forum at The Greenbrier. You can imagine the struggle he faces in asking people to focus on an ugly problem like hunger amid a meeting of insurance executives at a luxury resort. And he has persisted year after year.

While several of his insurance industry colleagues have made donations, it is a constant struggle to attract adequate funds and to convince people and companies of the need to continue supporting the effort.

Insurance agencies are very community-minded, and many companies already have favored philanthropic causes they support, but that means they often are less willing to make a sizable and continuous commitment to PACS USA, Mr. Singer noted.

"Most companies are already supporting charitable ventures and such," he said. "But I tell them that this is not a charity. It's a social ill in our country that we should not tolerate."

To find out how you and your organization can help Mr. Singer's efforts to relieve the disturbing problem of starving children in America, please visit the PACS USA Web site, at www.singernelson.com/PACS/.

Editorial Director Paul Winston's commentary appears fortnightly. He can be reached at pwinston@businessinsurance.com