

The Foster Group/Health Plan Purchasing Co. of NC, Inc.

WHO

It is difficult to imagine someone who enthuses about the same thing he has done for over 43 years, but W. Morgan Foster is that man. From the moment he seizes your hand in greeting and smiles his warm, sincere welcome, Foster has your attention, interest, and trust. The guy is a dynamo with a track record as a Hall of Fame Producer for BlueCross BlueShield of North Carolina, a company for which he is an agent; he is also an independent broker who selects from 10 or so companies in search of the best value-for-cost deal for his clients. "Make sure you understand," he admonishes this writer, "that an agent works for a particular company and a broker works for his client." "OK, Morgan," writer responds, "what is the bottom line for the client?" "The client's in charge, the client makes the decision; I counsel and advise, but the client spends his money in the way that's best for him," Foster instructs. Writer changes the subject: "Nice office you have here, Morgan."

WHERE

Foster's professional office at 2548-A Plantation Center Drive, on the same side of the street as Weddington Park Assisted Living and an emergency veterinarian hospital, is a warm and woody reminiscence of yesteryear. (Oh sure, there are computers, but who notices.) The chairs are comfortable, Foster's old style desk is remarkable, some file cabinets definitely are antiques from another era, and only a guy in the green eye shade is missing. None of the delightful ladies on staff would be caught dead in one of those, but they have caught Foster's affability. Foster knows his staff's "personal stuff" and he is prideful as he recounts their various community involvements, personal accomplishments, and professional abilities. The staff has longevity, and hence the expertise to handle a changing industry that consistently becomes more complex and which demands more effort for less compensation. "Hey, we do something different here," he grins, "We answer the phone. There's no "800 number dance" here or 'please listen to the following menu'." When pressed about office hours, he says "We're always here except for Friday afternoon; we take that off..." his voice trails as he glances over to one of staff who picks up the ball "...so the competition has time to catch up!" The ball is evident, too, in this delightful touch: Foster's old high school (Lee Edwards, now Asheville High School) football team picture hangs in the bathroom—he played linebacker and running back in the old leatherhead days. (Sidebar: Writer did not require use of the facility; Foster just included it on the office tour to insure writer noticed.) Foster attended business college in Asheville and began his sales career in Asheville; a transfer brought him to the Charlotte area. He has been in the present Matthews location for five years after moving the business from the Monroe-Weddington area. "I like doing business in Matthews; people still say 'no sir' and 'no ma'am' and 'thank you', he observes, "and I have a nice staff and nice clients."

WHY

Insurance, plain and simple. The firm specializes in health/dental/vision/life insurance products primarily designed for groups, although one agent/broker (Foster's wife) specializes in "groups of one".

HOW

The Foster Group knows that the insurance industry is changing rapidly and it knows that it is a confusing situation for the general public. "The client needs someone to explain what's going on and to guide him through the available options to find what's best for him—that's us; we're the consultant," Foster offers. The key to a successful business is service, he believes; you provide superior service and you keep your client. Repeat business is the way to maintain your status, and leads to word of mouth referrals for new business. This is Foster's mantra.

Business of the Week

Submitted to The Matthews Record

By George G. Moffat

26 May 2008