

All About Claims

Colorado Department of Labor & Employment
Division of Workers' Compensation
Communications Unit, 633 17th St., Suite 400
Denver, CO 80202-3660
www.coworkforce.com/dwc/

Bill Owens
Governor

Rick Grice
Executive Director

Bob Summers
Director



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Division Says Goodbye to Director MaryAnn Whiteside

MaryAnn Whiteside, Director of the Division of Workers' Compensation, retired on July 31, after more than 23 years of public service with the state of Colorado. During those years she held various positions within the State of Colorado. Most of the 1980's MaryAnn spent at the Office of the Colorado Attorney General, initially as an assistant attorney general and for the last five years as the First Assistant in charge of the Labor and Civil Rights Unit. Prior to becoming the Director of the Division of Workers' Compensation in January of 1997, she was also the Deputy Securities Commissioner, an Administrative Law Judge and the administrator for the State Personnel Board. Here are responses to a few questions about the last 10 years of her journey:

What do you know now that you would have liked to have known when you took this job 10 years ago?

Wow - quite a bit. But then, some days I feel pretty much like that quote from a Bob Seger song - wish I didn't know now what I didn't know then.

Have you evolved in your statutory role as administrator and enforcer of the Colorado Workers' Compensation Act and if so, how?

I'd like to think so. I have more of an appreciation of the nuances of the act and the authorizing environment, the legal/insurance/medical issues interacting with the regulatory structure and business needs.

What are some of the accomplishments of which you are most proud?

Several come to mind. The Division has instituted various types of training opportunities for staff - for example, medical terminology; employees take a 13 course workshop on all areas of workers' comp, succession training for those interested in supervision and management. The Division is more accessible. Information is available in various formats: hard copy, on the internet, on video, etc. The Division staff is open and helpful.

What is the future of workers' compensation in this state, in your opinion?

I think the workers' comp system needs to become more balanced; the costs and benefits need to be distributed fairly among the system participants. For the past 15 years since the 218 reform, there have been vast

improvements in some areas. Medical costs are subject to containment efforts while access to quality care has been maintained. Standards have been implemented for medical care; physicians practicing in the compensation arena are better trained. Insurance loss costs have been drastically reduced. Workers' comp is one type of insurance that is profitable. However, those profits and savings aren't being shared among the other system participants. Employers and injured workers aren't seeing overall reduction in premiums or increased indemnity benefits.

What are the greatest challenges to the comp system?

The 1991 reform effort involved a complex equilibrium among various interests. I believe that the implementation structure has become too fractured and this decentralization has resulted in an archaic, overly legalistic approach to dispute resolution. Too often individual case results seem illogical and harsh.

How do you find balance?

In my personal life? I wish I knew. I'm still madly trying to find some balance. I have a wonderful family, a husband and a daughter who are both very understanding of the stresses I face and forgiving of my idiosyncrasies. My family and friends anchor me to reality.

What advice will you leave the person who follows?

Two pieces of advice: First, there are great people who work at the Division, they make your job easier and make you look good. Be nice to them. Second, there are lots of people who will give you advice; all of it well intentioned, some of it useful. However, in the end you are the one who has to decide. Make your decision based on the facts before you and then let it go.

What advice would you give to someone interested in entering into public service?

Go for it! It may sound old fashioned but I truly believe that public service is a privilege. I believe the most we can ask for in our careers is to have interesting work. Public service has the hard problems, the interesting issues. The problems that no one else has yet solved. It's hard because lots of people care about the issues for lots of different, often conflicting, reasons. And lots of people second guess, quite vociferously, what you do. But the issues are interesting. And you are working on issues that affect people's lives and you aren't just marketing breakfast cereal.

What's next for you?

A bit of vacation and then I'm not quite sure. I truly don't have any plans other than to enjoy life and be with family.

Meet Bob Summers--newly appointed Division Director

Greetings. It is an honor to be named the new Director of the Colorado Division of Workers' Compensation. Having worked with MaryAnn Whiteside for a number of years, including the last six years here at the Division, I know how much she will be missed. However, this Division is made up of many hardworking employees and I am confident that we will have a smooth transition with no drop-off in service.

I believe that one of the many strong points of the Division has been its philosophy of being open to different ideas and giving people an opportunity to be heard. I intend to maintain that philosophy. The workers' compensation system has benefited greatly from the input and participation of many people. I look forward to working with all of you as we move forward.