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## Fifty years for Illinois' Attorneys' Title Guaranty Fund Inc.

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### Industry News

Thursday, July 03, 2014

Founded 50 years ago by a small group of downstate Illinois lawyers, Attorneys' Title Guaranty Fund Inc. (ATG) has evolved into a family of companies offering a broad spectrum of services to more than 4,000 lawyers in Illinois, Indiana, Wisconsin and Michigan. The company now garners revenue in excess of 100 million annually and will issue its three millionth title insurance policy this year.

"Our 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary is a celebration of our founding members and the thousands of law firms and agents who have together built the company into the success it is today," said Peter Birnbaum, ATG president and chief executive officer. "It's also a celebration of our staff — loyal stewards of the company who believe in our mission to be the premier lawyer service organization for the benefit of the public."

ATG was founded in 1964 thanks to the efforts of Urbana attorney Stanley Balbach and his law partners Richard Thies and Charles Webber. Balbach's early efforts built the foundation, and he remained active with the organization until his retirement from the board of directors in 2007. Balbach died in 2012 at the age of 92. Birnbaum cites newly elected Board Chair Ward McDonald, who served as CEO from 1970-1983, as the person most responsible for bringing ATG from a concept into a thriving business.

"It was Ward's unique ability to promote the ATG mission that built it into a grassroots movement, and over time — a formidable force in the legal and real estate communities," Birnbaum said.

In addition to providing title insurance and related services to homeowners and lenders through its members, ATG offers additional services for lawyers and their clients through its subsidiaries, including ATG Trust Co., ATG Legal Education, ATG LegalServe, Auctions by ATG, NLT Title, LLC, and The Judicial Sales Corp.

In the lead-up to its 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary, ATG continues in its tradition of being a good corporate citizen. ATG is a leading supporter of the Illinois Bar Foundation, the Chicago Bar Foundation, Mercy Housing, the Jesse White Foundation, The Cara Program, Big Brothers and Big Sisters, Urban Initiatives, University of Illinois College of Law, IIT Chicago-Kent College of Law, and many area bar associations.

"Many of our members and a high percentage of our staff and Board of Directors have been with ATG for more than 20 years," said Birnbaum, who joined the company in 1981 and has been chief executive officer since 1991. "For 50 years ATG has succeeded in the face of formidable odds — we should all be proud of the organization we have built."

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**Would it be a good idea to have a third-party company vet title agents?**

- Yes, it brings neutrality to the process and gives lenders the assurances they need.
- Yes, but only if the pricing and process is fair and doesn't discriminate.
- No, it's a violation of the title agent's private business operations.
- No, but we need to provide the lender with some sort of assurances.

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