



EDUCATION



Ellen M. Putnam: A Giant in Insurance Sales and Service

by Virginia E. Webb

IN HER LONG CAREER Ellen Putnam, CLU®, won many awards, but none as important as the John Newton Russell Award in 1978. Standing less than five feet tall, Ellen stood on a box so she could see over the podium as she addressed the audience, calling the award presented annually

by NAIFA (formerly NALU) since 1947 the “highest honor that can be bestowed upon an individual serving in the life insurance and financial planning industry.” The award’s namesake, John Newton Russell, worked to develop the original Chartered Life Underwriter® (CLU)® designation and was one of the American College’s incorporators and early trustees.

Putnam came to life insurance sales as a second career after having been trained in diet and nutrition. She enlisted and served with the Army Nurse Corps in base hospitals in France during World War 1, returning home in 1919 and becoming an agent with National Life of Vermont, where she remained for more than 60 years.

Believing “insurance is the one and only thing that anybody can count on that creates an immediate estate,” Putnam became a CLU® in 1930, one of the earliest women CLU® graduates of the American College.

A promoter of CLU® education, she was among the first woman members of the Rochester (N.Y.) Life Underwriters Association and was active in the Rochester Life Insurance and Trust Council. Putnam helped organize CLU® classes

(designed for life underwriters), and would then follow up with students from Rochester by writing them a “letter of congratulation and encouragement for further study.”

Active in NAIFA, she promoted women in the profession by helping to organize the Women Leaders Round Table in 1936. It required \$250,000 annual paid production in the qualifying year and helped women to advance in NAIFA and in the underwriting industry. Additionally, she served on many committees and with the New York State Association of Life Underwriters.

Putnam believed that “effective prospecting is the foundation of permanent success.” She said, “You need to work through people you know to get to people they know.” Putnam emphasized the power of relationships and asking questions. The ideology served her well: Even as late as January 1978 (at age 84) she was the agency leader in commissions earned for that month.

Ellen Putnam was small in stature but a giant in our industry. Born on October 12, 1894, she died in February 1989 at the age of 94. Her fondest wish was to “live so that I will make the world a better place for having lived.” We remember Ellen and honor her service to her profession. ■■



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