

# LEADERS OF INFLUENCE: INSURANCE



**A**FTER THE MOST DAMAGING WILDFIRE SEASON IN LOCAL HISTORY, LOS ANGELES FACES THE MANY CHALLENGES surrounding picking up the pieces and rebuilding businesses, communities and homes. For the many still confused and frustrated with what to do next, insurance professionals found themselves in heightened roles of responsibility – perhaps more than ever before – to help companies move forward and be prepared for future, similar disasters.

There are some truly outstanding professionals making up the Los Angeles insurance landscape. We've shone the spotlight on some of the very best of them here, along with information about their careers, practice and a quick look at what makes them so good at what they do.

Congratulations to the trailblazing professionals who made this list and thank you for your contributions to the local economy and for protecting our businesses from the unexpected.

*Methodology: The professionals featured in these pages did not pay to be included. Their profiles were drawn from nomination materials submitted to the Los Angeles Business Journal. Those selected for inclusion were reviewed by the editorial department. The professionals were chosen based on a demonstration of impact made on the profession and on the Los Angeles community.*

LEADERS OF INFLUENCE: INSURANCE



**ANDREW AGRESS**  
*Executive Vice President,  
Employee Benefits  
IMA Financial Group*

Andrew Agress has been with IMA Financial Group for more than 13 years, handling the insurance and risk management needs of some of the world's largest corporations. He is widely known locally as a human resources luminary in his role as president of the National Human Resources Association – Los Angeles (NHRA). Both within IMA and in the broader Los Angeles community, Agress has differentiated himself from his peers thanks to his dynamic experience in the human resources space, which gives him a unique perspective into the employee benefits challenges that employers face and ability to provide customized solutions to meet their needs. As an insurance professional, his role with NHRA has helped him build a community of HR executives to support one another in shared resources.



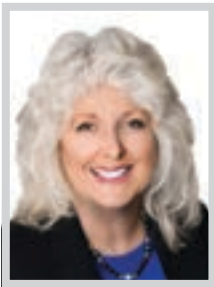
**JOHANNA ALVAREZ**  
*California Market Leader,  
Employee Benefits  
IMA Financial Group*

Johanna Alvarez was the first in her family to graduate college after attending UCLA and learning English as a 2nd language at a young age. After joining the IMA Financial Group in January 2014 and working in a variety of client-facing roles, Alvarez advanced to market director at only the age of 36 and today leads one of the largest employee benefits divisions within the office, bringing in over \$36 million in revenue to the agency annually. Alvarez leads a team of over 60 benefits professionals and collaborates closely with local sales teams to drive organic growth, build optimal benefits packages to suit client needs, and drive positive client experiences in an ever-changing employee benefits landscape.



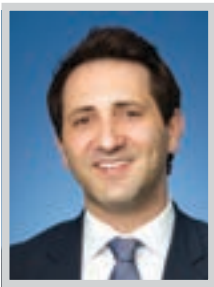
**PETER ARKLEY**  
*President, National Retail Brokerage  
Alliant Insurance Services*

As president of national retail brokerage at Alliant Insurance Services, Peter Arkley oversees the development and implementation of the retail property and casualty and employee benefits business strategies. Under Arkley's leadership, Alliant has grown to become a top five US retail P&C broker with \$5.1 billion in revenue, over 14,000 employees, and over \$47 billion in premium placed. In addition to Alliant's employee benefits operation, Arkley's purview encompasses a nationwide footprint of 15 specialty insurance operations that include agribusiness, aviation, construction, public entity, real estate, executive risk, financial institutions, healthcare, law firms and more. Arkley also oversees Alliant's five regional operations across the US, specializing in the delivery of sophisticated insurance services and products.



**MARY CRAIG CALKINS**  
*Partner, Insurance Recovery Practice  
Blank Rome LLP*

Mary Craig Calkins has more than 35 years of experience representing policyholders exclusively in multi-million-dollar, insurance coverage disputes involving directors' and officers' (D&O) liability, entertainment and media, wildfires and other natural disasters, intellectual property, cybersecurity, and other areas. Calkins is advising on insurance issues for a major television network regarding multiple claims seeking billions of dollars related to election fraud allegations. She is also advising an NFL team, and multiple entertainment production companies on insurance recovery issues related to production losses due to catastrophes, cast health issues and mandated shutdowns caused by the pandemic. Calkins is serving her second term as national revenue officer of the American Bar Association litigation section.



**DEREK CHAIKEN**  
*Attorney  
Merlin Law Group*

Derek Chaiken is a seasoned trial attorney at Merlin Law Group renowned for his unwavering dedication to advocating for home and business owners in the face of property damage disputes. Specializing in recovering compensation from insurers and third parties, Chaiken's career has been defined by his ability to navigate complex legal challenges and achieve favorable outcomes for his clients. His expertise spans mediation, appraisals, arbitration and trial. Chaiken combines tenacity with empathy through his work, ensuring that his clients feel supported throughout the legal process. Chaiken serves as general counsel for PCAPIA – the Pacific Coast Association of Public Insurance Adjusters. He is also a board member and regional commissioner for the American Youth Soccer Organization (AYSO).



**ANDREW FORCHELLI**  
*Executive Vice President – California  
HUB International*

Newly appointed as executive vice president for HUB International's California operations, Andrew Forchelli has been a stand-out star ever since joining the firm 11 years ago as regional leader and president of the Sports & Entertainment Division for the Greater Los Angeles area. Prior to his promotion, Forchelli served as president of HUB Los Angeles-Orange County in which he was responsible for the overall strategy and operations at LAOC, a \$50 million branch with over 250 employees dedicated to insurance and risk management solutions for middle market businesses. He has an overarching responsibility for sales, talent management, claims, marketing, client services, carrier relationships and strategic planning. He also serves as a member of HUB California's Executive Leadership team and executive champion for the region's DEI committee.



**JIM GILLETTE**  
*President, Pacific South Region  
EPIC Insurance  
Brokers & Consultants*

Jim Gillette is president of EPIC's Pacific South region and responsible for the management, leadership and growth of the operations in Los Angeles. Throughout his tenure at the firm, he has been a member of EPIC's executive and management committees and been a key part of the operational leadership team that has taken the firm's revenues from approximately \$40 million with 250 employees at the time he joined to over \$1 billion in revenue with over 3000 employees across the country. Gillette also continues to work as a client team leader designing property, casualty and employee benefits insurance programs for clients as well as coordinating risk management and brokerage services through the industry and specialty practice groups within EPIC.



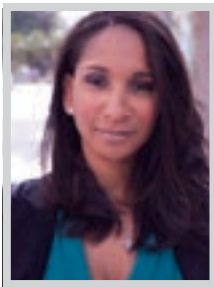
**SCOTT GREGORY**  
*Area President - Los Angeles  
Gallagher*

Scott Gregory serves as the area president for Gallagher's greater Los Angeles region and has led the Gallagher Benefits Services Los Angeles branch to a "Branch of the Year" award this year. Gregory leads a sustainable high-performance team and is focused on developing, coaching, mentoring, retaining top talent and focusing on exceeding client expectations. He has said that Gallagher's culture, defined by "The Gallagher Way," is the organization's differentiator and what has kept him with Gallagher for nearly 20 years. Beyond his role at Gallagher, Gregory is committed to giving back to the community. As a board member and coach for the Special Olympics of Southern California, he plays an active role in supporting nearly 39,000 athletes through sports, education and health programs.



**HEATHER HABES**  
*Partner  
Covington & Burling LLP*

Heather Habes has specialized in insurance coverage work for a decade. Beyond an extensive array of litigation matters, she has developed expertise as a trusted advisor for in-house counsel and senior executives seeking to maximize insurance protection and recovery. Habes co-led a team of Covington lawyers representing The Nature Conservancy in the purchase of the first-ever coral reef insurance policy in the United States. The policy will provide funding for rapid coral reef repair and restoration across Hawai'i immediately following hurricane or tropical storm damage. She also co-led a team of Covington lawyers representing Art.com in a lawsuit against Allied World Assurance Company (U.S.) Inc. to recover defense and indemnity costs under a directors and officers liability policy.



**GINGER JONAS**  
*Vice President Employee Benefits  
USI Insurance Services*

Ginger Jonas is the vice president of employee benefits at USI, a worldwide insurance brokerage and consulting enterprise that provides tailored employee benefits, property and casualty, personal risk, and retirement solutions to meet the unique needs of every client. Armed with a BA from Florida A&M University and certifications in Lean Six Sigma and Scrum Master, she possesses expertise that enables her to swiftly adapt to market shifts, staying ahead of the curve. Jonas is an accomplished seasoned consultant, with over a decade of knowledge in the industry, and is renowned for her ability to craft tailored solutions that drive financial prosperity, improve the population's health, and align with her clients' human capital strategy.





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LEADERS OF INFLUENCE: INSURANCE



**LINDA KORNFELD**  
*Partner and Co-Chair,  
Insurance Recovery Practice  
Blank Rome LLP*

Linda Kornfeld is partner and co-chair of Blank Rome’s nationally recognized insurance recovery practice. She is at the top of the highly competitive, male-dominated insurance policyholder bar — one of only six women ranked nationally by Chambers USA.

In a record TCPA private class action award, a team led by Kornfeld proved that an insurance policy limit is not truly a limit if the insurer fails to take its duties to its policyholder seriously. Kornfeld’s team played a central role as litigation coverage counsel and received the Daily Journal CLAY Award based on this case. Kornfeld also represents the NFL’s Philadelphia Eagles against FM Insurance under its \$1 billion property/business interruption COVID-19 losses in Pennsylvania federal court.



**BRIAN LACHER**  
*Partner  
Nava Benefits*

With a foundation built on trust, innovation and an unmatched work ethic, Brian Lacher has carved a distinguished path in the health insurance industry. Throughout his career, he has been a relentless advocate for both employers and employees, consistently finding innovative solutions to reduce costs while ensuring access to high-quality healthcare. His dedication has resulted in millions of dollars in savings for his clients, a testament to his ability to navigate the complexities of the insurance landscape with precision.

Lacher’s approach to creating trusted relationships with his clients revolves around prioritizing their needs above all else. He operates with a profound dedication to their success, consistently putting their interests ahead of his own, and offering consistent guidance every step of the way.



**MARTY LEVY**  
*CEO  
Corpstrat*

Martin Levy, CLU/RHU founded Corporate Strategies over 20 years ago. He is a Chartered Life Underwriter (CLU), Registered Health Underwriter, a Certified Annuity Analyst, and holds a certificate in Long Term Care Insurance credential. Levy is a frequent contributor to many industry publications and is also a life and qualifying member of the Million Dollar Round Table, an elite organization representing the top 1% of producers in the life insurance industry.

Levy holds a BA in Psychology and, as a CLU, has earned the premier credential in the insurance profession. He leads an over-achieving team, many of whom have been with Corpstrat over 20 years. He continues to serve his loyal client base, both of large and small scale.



**ERIN POWELL**  
*Senior Vice President, Property & Casualty  
IMA Financial Group*

Erin Powell, IMA Financial Group’s senior vice president, is the company’s property & casualty (P&C) leader for California with more than 25 years of experience in the commercial insurance industry. Powell has held a variety of leadership and service roles throughout her career, and after nearly eight years in her current position, she covers all areas of P&C, including operations, strategic planning, business development and management of all P&C leaders at IMA West.

Over the past five years, IMA West’s commercial P&C business has more than doubled under Powell’s leadership. Currently 75% of her team arrived in their positions through internal promotion – a testament to her focus on empowerment through leadership training, sales and service fluency.



**NICK RAMIREZ**  
*Agency Owner  
Goosehead Insurance – Nick Ramirez*

Nick Ramirez, agency owner of Goosehead Insurance, is a native Angeleno with over 10 years of experience in the insurance industry. He combines his deep understanding of the Southern California community with a client-centered approach to deliver custom-tailored insurance solutions. His expertise spans homeowners, auto, life, and specialty insurance, with a focus on providing comprehensive coverage options that meet his clients’ unique needs. Under Ramirez’s leadership, his agency has earned recognition as being in the top 1% at Goosehead Insurance.

A dedicated mentor and community leader, Ramirez has held leadership roles with the San Fernando Valley Jaycees, serving as chairman, president, and vice president of membership.



Congratulations to our partners **Mary Craig Calkins, David Thomas, and Linda Kornfeld** for being recognized as “**Leaders of Influence**” by the *Los Angeles Business Journal*.

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**ANGIE RICHARDS**  
*Vice President*  
Poms & Associates

Angie Richards has built a distinguished career in employee benefits, combining financial expertise with an unwavering commitment to employee wellness. Her ability to craft benefits programs that seamlessly blend fiscal responsibility with workplace culture has made her a standout leader in the industry.

Starting her career on the carrier side, Richards developed a deep understanding of the complexities of benefits programs. This experience allowed her to transition into brokerage with a unique perspective, advocating for both employers and employees alike. She quickly became known for her hands-on approach, ensuring that employees, particularly those unfamiliar with technology, could fully engage with their benefits. Richards has consistently prioritized accessibility, education and empowerment.



**MITCH ROSENBERG**  
*CEO / Owner*  
MDR Insurance & Financial Services

Mitch Rosenberg is a certified financial planner, chartered life underwriter, chartered financial consultant and certified public accountant. As founder of MDR Insurance & Financial Services, he manages about \$200 million in assets and has helped thousands of individuals, families and business owners make smart decisions regarding insurance and financial products, ensuring they accomplish their goals.

Rosenberg is a member agent of The Nautilus Group and the Nautilus Plus inner circle, a service of New York Life Insurance Company that is limited to an exclusive group of the company's insurance professionals. He is one of the top 30 investment advisers affiliated with Eagle Strategies LLC and is a qualifying and life member in the Million Dollar Round Table.



**DANONE SIMPSON**  
*Founder; CEO*  
Montage Insurance Solutions

Montage Insurance Solutions founder and CEO Danone Simpson is a fearless leader and mentor to all that work at the company. A trailblazer in the insurance industry, she has built an agency focused on employee benefit and property & casualty programs for the commercial and non-profit sectors. Under Simpson's leadership, the firm has partnered with over 100 carriers to ensure the optimal insurance solutions for its clients.

Simpson founded a sister company, Simplicity in 2012 that handles small business, event insurance, travel insurance and Medicare. In 2023, she began the development of a software designed to manage auditing for Montage's clients. She received her MBA from Pepperdine University's Graziadio School of Business in 2012.



**DAVID A. THOMAS**  
*Partner, Insurance Recovery Practice*  
Blank Rome LLP

In an era in which businesses, institutions, and individuals rely heavily on their insurance policies to protect against losses and liabilities due to cyber-attacks, business litigation, natural disasters, and more, Dave Thomas is a fierce advocate for policyholders when insurance companies don't fulfill their coverage obligations.

Thomas counsels and litigates on behalf of policyholders in a diverse array of commercial insurance lines, including cybersecurity and privacy, commercial general liability, umbrella, D&O, financial institution bonds, bankers professional liability, employment practices liability, and first-party property and business interruption. He also counsels and represents individual property owners concerning insurance losses, including from wildfires, mudslides, and other natural disasters.

'The future of your business is built on the foundation of preparedness, and business insurance is the cornerstone of that foundation.'

—CHRIS SWIFT



IMA is proud to congratulate our colleagues recognized in the *Los Angeles Business Journal's* Leaders of Influence: Insurance 2025.



**ANDREW AGGRESS**  
*Executive Vice President,*  
*Employee Benefits*



**JOHANNA ALVAREZ**  
*California Market Leader,*  
*Employee Benefits*



**ERIN POWELL**  
*Senior Vice President,*  
*Property & Casualty*



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# Understanding Insurance Coverage for Floods and Mudslides in Wildfire-Affected Areas

With recent sustained rains and the atmospheric river demonstrating an example of increased mudslides risk, Insurance Commissioner Ricardo Lara has reminded LA residents — especially those in wildfire-affected areas — that insurance companies are legally required to cover mudslides and debris flows if they result from recent fires that have destabilized hillsides.

“Protecting consumers is our main focus,” said Commissioner Lara. “With this atmospheric river on the way, communities recovering from wildfires face an even greater risk. It’s critical for Southern California residents to understand their insurance protections and take the necessary steps to secure the assistance they need. Those impacted should check their policies and seek help to make sure they receive the coverage they deserve.”

Wildfire-scorched landscapes, often referred to as “burn scars,” leave hillsides vulnerable to flash floods and debris flows. Without vegetation to absorb rainfall, water rapidly runs off, and extreme wildfire heat can create a water-repellent soil layer, further amplifying the risk. Even light rain can trigger dangerous flooding, especially in steep areas. Homes, roads and infrastructure near recent burn area face heightened danger, often with little warning.

Many policyholders may not be aware that homeowners’ and commercial insurance

policies typically exclude flood, mudslide, debris flow and other similar disasters — unless they are directly or indirectly caused by a recent wildfire or another peril covered by the applicable insurance policy. The Department of Insurance has posted a fact sheet for consumers to answer questions about what their policies cover.

The Montecito mudslide in Santa Barbara County in January 2018 that followed the destructive Thomas Fire claimed 23 lives and caused more than \$421 million in damage, according to Department of Insurance data. Following that disaster, the Governor enacted a new law to help prevent confusion about coverage following mudslides.

Commissioner Lara also urged consumers to take the following steps to prepare when storms are due to approach:

- Use a smart phone to perform a home inventory to create a record of belongings and store scans of important documents for easy access.
- Locate insurance papers and put in a safe place or upload to an online location.
- For renters, consider purchasing renters’ insurance to protect personal belongings, which typically are not covered by your landlord’s homeowners’ policy.
- Consider comprehensive auto insurance, which would protect your vehicle in the event of flood damage.



- Consider flood insurance for future disasters in addition to a homeowners’ insurance policy. The National Flood Insurance Program currently provides the majority of flood coverage written in the state, but private flood insurance is also available. Flood insurance takes effect 30 days after it is purchased, except

in the case of a home purchase where flood insurance is required by the lender.

*The Department of Insurance can help consumers with insurance coverage or claim questions. Contact the consumer hotline at (800) 927-4357 or through online chat or email at [insurance.ca.gov](mailto:insurance.ca.gov).*

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**DEREK S. CHAIKEN, ESQ.**  
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