

# Family and Finance

## Father-daughter team achieves business, personal dreams

By Justin Liggin

**F**rom an early age, Robert “Bob” Wernecke was inspired by his mother to know his worth and then add tax, a message that influenced him to work hard, chase goals and find joy in his craft.

He took that knowledge in 1985 and parlayed it into his ECA Financial. Approaching its 40th anniversary, ECA Financial is focused on financial services, benefits, retirement strategy, and more needs for families and businesses.

While building the business, he also served in several leadership positions within the industry, most notably as president of the National Association of Insurance & Financial Advisors.

### Early start

Wernecke’s pursuit for success is one that started 30 miles outside of Tiletown in Manitowoc, Wisconsin, where he grew up alongside his three siblings. While he enjoyed his life in Wisconsin, Wernecke looked to break the mold and escape the traditions of his town.

“I came from a town with only two industries: ship manufacturing and aluminum cookware production. You worked in one or the other for your whole career and then you retired — that just wasn’t for me,” Wernecke says.

Wernecke met his wife, Diane, in high school. Shortly after graduating in 1964, the high school sweethearts chose Chandler as their wedding and honeymoon destination in 1967.

Falling in love with the landscapes and



For over 35 years, ECA Financial has provided services to clients in the Airpark area.  
(Robert Wernecke/Submitted)

demeanor of Arizona, the couple packed up and moved to the Scottsdale Airpark area in 1968. The area would become home base for life and business.

“Fifty years later and we still have no regrets about moving here, even in August,” Wernecke says.

Recalling his mother’s encouraging words, Wernecke went headfirst into an industry where he could determine his own worth and help others: insurance.

“My mother told me, ‘If you want to get paid what you’re worth, go into commission sales,’ so I took her advice and made it my goal to go into insurance,” Wernecke says.

“And she was right! I quickly learned that you get paid exactly what you put in.”

Within a year of living in Arizona, Wernecke landed his first job at MetLife in 1968 at 22 years old as he confidently entered the

office and proclaimed his interest in selling insurance.

“I was hired almost as soon as I walked in the door and said I wanted to start selling,” Wernecke says. “I was told that no one my age had ever said they wanted to sell insurance. The sheer anomaly of it caught their attention.”

He’s a financial aficionado now, but Wernecke explains he was a slow burner when it came to mastering the craft.

“I definitely wasn’t an overnight success,” Wernecke says. “It took me 10 years to truly understand the meaning of my work, which is the client. I also learned more about the meaning of value and found out that if you want to become more valuable, you must give more of yourself and always be willing to help others.”

In addition to his role as an insurance sales-

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man, Wernecke also added the title of father to his resume as he and Diane welcomed their daughters, Lisa and Pamela, in 1970 and 1973, respectively.

As his daughters grew up in the Airpark area, Wernecke joined the team at General American Life Insurance Company in 1978 following his 10-year stint at MetLife — providing another opportunity for him to harness his skills and build the foundation for what would eventually become his own insurance business.

## A family affair

Upon graduating from Saguaro High School in 1988, Wernecke's daughter, Lisa Martin, attended Scottsdale Community College and ASU before heading into a full-time position at Biltmore Insurance Group. She would move into human resources and administration roles — first with Surface Tek in 1994 and then at Mobility Electronics in 1999. Upon departure from Mobility Electronics in 2002, Wernecke offered her an opportunity to join ECA.

"I was hesitant because I didn't even know what my father did for a living, not in a day-to-day way at least," Martin says.

"I told him that I would interview with his office manager under the condition that he removed my name from my resume. I wanted her to hire me for me, not just because I was Bob's daughter."

Wernecke's office manager pops into his office.

"With no knowledge that Lisa was my daughter, she told me that I would be crazy not to hire her. This was the beginning of our partnership at ECA," Wernecke says.

Starting as an executive assistant to her father, Martin quickly picked up the job and within six months had earned her health and



Bob Wernecke and Lisa Martin, the father-daughter duo behind ECA Financial.  
(Robert Wernecke/Submitted)

life insurance license and began an individual role in 2003. Eventually, she became firm vice president. Along the way, Martin also gave birth to her son, Jackson, in 2006.

"Hiring Lisa was the best choice I have ever made for my business, without a doubt," Wernecke says.

With Martin's strengths in life and health insurance and the administrative side of the business and Wernecke's specialization in life and disability insurance, benefits planning and sales, the duo meets the needs of their wide client base.

"Neither one of us was quite sure how it would work out in the beginning, but I got to learn from my father, and he's the best in the industry. Our background, values, work ethic, outlook and attitude align perfectly for us at ECA," Martin says.

The duo has proved to not only make a difference in their clients' lives but in the community as well. The team has served as guest speakers at St. Mary's Food Bank Community Kitchen for seven years to help students learn money management skills.

Martin assists at Scottsdale Bible Church as a budget coach and children's ministry assistant. Martin also volunteered with Gabriel's Dreams, an organization aiding Sudanese refugees

in Arizona. Wernecke's community efforts include serving as a lector at St. Patrick's Catholic Church and serving among the initial donors to launch A Stepping Stone Foundation, which helps provide high-quality multigenerational learning to children in Phoenix.

"Life is all about giving, not getting. My dad always made sure we gave back to the community and realized that you can't always take. The farmer always puts back into the field what he gets out, and life is just the same," Wernecke says.

"If you want to grow, then you must meet people who are more intelligent than you and can provide the mentorship you need. If you're not growing, you're dying."

On top of offering world-class service to satisfied clients, 2021 was a special year for Martin as she tied the knot with her husband, Bill. She joins Bill's son, 12-year-old Quinn, her 16-year-old son Jackson, and their two rescue dogs.

"It took me until I found this job to discover that this is not just a career but my life mission. I can help people and make a living — it doesn't even feel like work to me," Martin says.

As for Wernecke, he still finds passion in his work every day.

"I've only being doing this for 54 years, but my retirement plan is to slowly taper off over the next 37 years until I'm out of the business," Wernecke says. "Everyone always laughs at that, but I will do this job until someone tells me I can't do it anymore." ■



Lisa Martin is the vice president of ECA Financial in Scottsdale.  
(Lisa Martin/Submitted)