

# Vernon LaVia

• Aurora, Illinois 60505 •

## **EXECUTIVE PROFILE:**

**Enthusiastic, passionate senior executive & Duke University graduate (+Navy ROTC), combining corporate, small business and non-profit organizational and board leadership experience. Effective representative of any organization in public or corporate relations and business development.**

**15 years** at Fortune 100 Insurance corporations managing 100+ employees, \$1.2 billion in annual revenue and more than 1,500 accounts.

**22 years** of entrepreneurial/business ownership experience, directing due diligence, start up, launch and operations of 18 for-profit small businesses in national, regional and local environments.

**11 years** served on the Aurora University "Institutional Review Board of Directors;" Most tenured of any other member on the Board.

**25 years** in multiple community and faith-based 501(c)(3) orgs.; founder, co-founder or Board Mbr.

**31 years** licensed insurance agent calling on C-suite executives, businesses, non-profits and individuals.

**46 years** Bird watching on 6 Continents, 42 Countries and all 50 States.

**13 years** substitute teaching grades K – 12 (Aurora Christian School & District 129 Aurora)

**25 years** married to 8-term IL State Representative Linda Chapa LaVia; Father of two (ages 19 & 16).

## **SUMMARY of QUALIFICATIONS:**

- Dedicated and tireless professional. Offers an approach to everyday organizational, fiscal and operational sales issues, which balances innovation and discipline. Strategic thinker with the ability to translate big picture vision into detailed street-level action plans.
- Well-respected team player who forms cohesive relationships with local and national government officials, legislators and collegiate leaders; effectively drive participation, interdisciplinary engagement and build bridges to expand support.
- Strong facilitation and mediation skills to advance discussions and initiatives communicating with home office colleagues, prospects and clients at all levels.
- Skilled in all areas of prospect and client management, including individuals, corporations, small businesses, non-profits, and spiritual and charitable service organizations, including the analysis of budget allocation, marketing, community relations, forecasting and team collaboration.

### **CORPORATE EXPERIENCE:**

**AETNA INSURANCE**, Chicago, Illinois

*Fortune 50 national group medical, life and employee benefits insurance provider.*

**Vice President/District Manager, Sales & Customer Relations,**

**1996 to 1999**

Full executive operational, marketing, business development, strategic steering and fiscal oversight responsibility for a \$1.2 billion, multi-state region with more than 1,500 corporate group health

AETNA INSURANCE, Continued...

insurance clients. Recruited, hired, trained and developed a team of nine sales managers and nine customer service managers with more than 100 indirect reports, to call on C-suite decision-makers. Managed a \$40 million operating budget. Led design and execution of regional marketing, sales, technology and branding programs. Created and administered marketing plans, standards and metrics region-wide, as well as developed pricing strategies.

- Transition Officer: \$1 billion New York Life Insurance/NYLCare Acquisition Integration: Senior strategic level project planning, oversight and management role providing business, client and operational leadership to direct human, business and technical capital transition from design and metrics establishment through Day 1 launch.

**Vice President, Sales****1993 to 1996**

Trained, mentored, coached and developed a team of nine group insurance sales professional, calling on C-suite leaders and providing direct support and insurance advisory services to corporations in the Chicago area.

- Chairperson, United Way Campaign: Led promotion and organization of United Way fundraising campaigns in an office with 700+ personnel.

LINCOLN NATIONAL INSURANCE/GREAT LAKES HMO, Chicago, IL

*Fortune 100 national group medical, life & employee benefits insurance provider.*

**Senior Employee Benefits Manager,****1989 to 1993**

Direct accountability for the daily management, support and growth of a book of business accounting for \$28.5 million in annual revenue. Delivered consulting and corporate advisory services to senior business and HR teams for the management of medical, dental, life, STD/LTD and long-term care programs, while concurrently targeting relationships with brokers to establish and grow an indirect sales channel.

- Managed opening of Chicago sales & service branch, including establishing processes, staffing and launching initial sales & marketing programs.
- Integration coordinator for sales department during TakeCare HMO merger and integration.

PRUDENTIAL INSURANCE COMPANY OF AMERICA, Philadelphia, PA**Associate Group Manager,****1985 to 1989**

Responsible for direct sales and sales team management, as well as client relations, consulting and daily management of group health benefit plans (medical, dental, disability) for small to mid-sized accounts. Provided best practice and industry standard recommendations to clients. Developed strategic sales and marketing plans and directed full project implementation life cycles, including developing business cases illustrating ROI.

- Achieved "Top Producing Sales Manager" status, Philadelphia, 1988.

**ENTREPRENEURIAL/  
BUSINESS OWNERSHIP:**

**Business Owner,**

**1994 to Present**

*Founded 20 corporations since 1994; includes co-Founding two (2) non-profit organizations.*

BUSINESS OWNERSHIP, Continued...

VJL Independent Insurance Sales

**2000 to Present**

**Independent Insurance Professional; Farmers Insurance and American Westbrook Insurance Agency (life, health, property & casualty)**

Defibrillators, Inc., USA and Defibrillators USA, LLC

**President/Founder**

**2003 to Present**

Established a wholesale Durable Medical Equipment distributorship supplying individuals, small businesses and large corporate accounts with portable defibrillators. Source and manage national distributors in a pull-through marketing approach.

Benefit Decisions Insurance Agency, Inc.

**Private Shareholder**

**2001 to Present**

**Vice President of Sales & Investor Relations Advisor**

**2/2001 to 11/2001**

Member of initial start up team for due diligence, planning and organization of firm, including leading initial and mezzanine capital raise (\$2 million). Recruited, trained and managed sales and client service personnel; established outside sales operations, customer service standards and hired a manager.

5Way, LLC

**President & Sole Member**

**2013 to Present**

Commercial & residential property ownership and management; 7 properties & 13 tenants

La Aurora Cocktails & Cigars, Inc.

**President** (Martini & Cigar Bar)

**1997 to 2004**

Aurora Pizzeria

**President**

**2001 to 2003**

Masonic Temple/Lincoln Manor Banquets & Weddings, Inc.

**President** (100+ banquet events per year)

**1998 to 2002**

CGL Enterprises Property Management, Inc.

**President** (Co-owned & managed over 50,000 sq ft of commercial space)

**1998 to 2002**

VJL Floor Planning (Show Room Auto Sales, Inc.)

**President** (Owned all the cars on the lot at any given time)

**2002 to 2003**

VJL Finance Company

**President** (Auto loans/used cars)

**2002 to 2003**

Dream Home Builders, Inc.

**V.P. Finance & co-Owner**

**1999 to 2000**

Personal Pen, Inc.

**V.P. Sales & co-Owner Partner**

**1999 to 2001**

The World Cafe, Inc.

**Vice President** (Five Separate Coffee & Sandwich Shops)

**1994 to 2000**

**CORE Non-Profit LEADERSHIP:**

MATERNITY HOMES OF FOX VALLEY, Batavia/Mooseheart, Illinois (2010-2014)  
Teen Maternity Crisis Task Force (2007-2010)  
**Co-Founder/Board of Directors** **2007 to 2014**  
 Traveled nationally and met with more than 70 pastors to refine concept of a faith-based maternity home for pregnant teenagers in crisis providing holistic, comprehensive shelter, healthcare, counseling and education.

CARPENTER’S PLACE AURORA, Aurora, Illinois (2004-2010)  
Homelessness Task Force (2001-2004)  
*Homelessness management organization started as a committee with a \$25,000 grant from a local church and Aurora Downtown Board. Convened key community stakeholders for two years and traveled nationally to study models. Created Carpenter’s Place as a faith-based, 501(c)(3) NPO in 2004. Integrated into Hesed House, Aurora in 2010.*  
**Co-Founder, Board President, Treasurer** **2004 to 2010**  
 Founded and developed this faith-based organization focused on spiritual, vocational, educational and personal development to rebuild the lives of homeless/near-homeless individuals and families.

OUR LADY OF GOOD COUNSEL CHURCH, Aurora, Illinois  
**Member, Board of Directors/Pastoral Board** **2007 to Present**  
**Member, Fundraising Committee/Capital Campaign** **2007 to 2009**  
**Eucharistic Minister** **2007 to Present**

KIWANIS CLUB OF AURORA, Aurora, Illinois **2001 to Present**  
**Lt. Governor, Kiwanis Region** 2008 to 2009  
**Elected Club President** 2006 to 2007  
**Membership Co-Chair** 2006 to 2014  
 Instrumental in growing membership base from 61 to 115 members.

SCI-TECH HANDS-ON MUSEUM, Aurora, Illinois  
**Executive Board of Directors** **1/2010 to 7/2010**  
**Board of Directors** **2001 to 2011**  
**Membership & Marketing Committees, Co-Chair** **2002 to 2011**  
 Served as a key catalyst to raise more than \$2 million for a museum expansion and renovation, and aided in securing new exhibits, which facilitated membership growth from 400 to 1,300.

CROHN’S & COLITIS FOUNDATION OF AMERICA, Chicago, IL/Philadelphia, PA  
**Executive Board of Directors/Treasurer (IL Chapter)** **1998 to 2005**  
**Board of Directors (IL Chapter)** **2000 to 2005**  
**Board of Directors (PA Chapter)** **1986 to 1989**  
 Grew budget from \$600,000 to \$1.5 million as treasurer.

**ADDITIONAL  
COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP:**

- @ **Crime Stoppers of Aurora**, PRESIDENT, Board of Directors **2011 to Present**
- @ **Endangered Species Protection Board of IL**, Appointed by Gov. Quinn **2014 to 2017**
- @ **Aurora University, INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD**, Member **2005 to Present**
- @ **Kane Co. Audubon**, Birding Club; Field Trip Leader, Aurora/Chicago, IL **2000 to Present**
- @ **The Conservation Foundation**, Kane Co. Advisory Board **2013 to Present**
- @ **Navy League of Aurora**, Aurora, IL, Member **2003 to Present**
- @ **Aurora Citizen’s Police Academy**, Volunteer Police Officer, Aurora, IL **2001 to Present**
- @ **Salvation Army**, Christmas Bell Ringer & Money Pot Counter, Aurora, IL **2002 to Present**
- @ **Junior Achievement**, 3<sup>rd</sup> & 6<sup>th</sup> Grade Classroom Mentor, Chciago/Aurora, IL **1995 to 2012**
- @ **Girl Scouts of America**, Asst. Troop Leader; Troop #99, Aurora, IL **2005 to 2006**
- @ **Fox River Clean-up and Re-planting Initiative**, Aurora, IL **2003 to 2009**
- @ **Aurora Downtown Board of Directors**, Publicly Elected, 2-terms, Aurora, IL **2004 to 2010**  
Chair, Parking Committee **2006 to 2009**
- @ **Violence Prevention Task Force**, Founding Board Mbr., Aurora, IL **2002 to 2006**
- @ **Communities in Schools/Bridging the Gap Initiative**, Board Mbr., Aurora, IL **2002 to 2006**
- @ **Downtown Destinations (Marketing Cooperative)**, Founding Mbr., Aurora, IL **1999 to 2002**
- @ **Community Health Charities, Board of Directors**, Chicago, IL **1997 to 1998**
- @ **Working in the Schools (WITS), 3<sup>rd</sup> Grade Tutor, Chicago, IL** **1997 to 1999**
- @ **St. Nicholas Church**, Eucharistic Minister, Aurora, IL **1997 to 2007**

**AWARDS:**

- **“Volunteer of the Year”**, City of Aurora Mayor’s Office of Special Events, NOMINATED, 2008 and 2009
- **Recipient, “Clyde Hewitt Award”**, 13 consecutive years, Kiwanis Club, 2002-2015
- **Recipient, “Chairman of the Year Award”**, Aurora Downtown Parking Task Force, 2006.
- **Recipient, “Community Leader Award” & Key Honoree**, Give Hope, Inc., 2008

**CERTIFICATIONS:**

- Insurance Producer, Life & Health, Property & Casualty** **1985 to Present**
- Substitute Teaching Certification, State of Illinois** **2003 to Present**

**MILITARY:**

- U.S. NAVY (Officer Candidate School/Naval Science Institute), Newport, RI** **1983 to 1984**  
Graduate
- Highest Rank: Midshipman 1<sup>st</sup> Class
- Honorable Discharge

**EDUCATION:****DUKE UNIVERSITY**, Durham, North Carolina

- Bachelor of Science, Economics (cum laude), Conferred, 1985
- Minors: English & Classical Studies
- Assistant Editor/Columnist, Duke University Newspaper.
- Pitcher, Duke University Baseball, fall team 1982-1983

NROTC (Naval Reserve Officer Training Corps), Full Scholarship.

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**PERSONAL:**

- BIRD WATCHING-45 years
  - Traveled to 6 Continents, 47 Countries, and all 50 States
  - Delaware Valley Ornithological Club, Member
  - Kane County Audubon Club, Member
  - DuPage Birding Club, Member
  - LifeBird Nature Tours, Inc., Trip Leader
  - PHILATELY: US Commemorative Postage Stamp Collection, 1970 – 1985
  - Baseball: Pitcher every season...somewhere...on some team...age 9 – 30.
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**REFERENCES:**

## Contact Information UPON REQUEST:

- @ Father David Engbarth, Catholic Priest
- @ John Rico, President & Founder, Rico Enterprises
- @ Bill Berenson, Past-President, Aetna Insurance- Midwest Markets
- @ Others upon request