

Turkington keeps on trucking

By JAN WITKOSKI
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Mary Turkington planned to be a journalist. In fact, she was pursuing that goal when she landed a job with the Kansas Motor Carriers Association in 1946.

Three days after graduating with the first class from the William Allen White School of Journalism in 1946, Turkington reported to work at KMCA as editor of the association's trade magazine, *The Kansas Transporter*.

Forty-two years later, she has logged 38 years of lobbying experience for the trucking industry.

Not a day goes by, however, that Turkington, as executive director of KMCA, doesn't use her journalistic skills.

"My journalistic training is something I use every day of my life," Turkington said. "Not only in terms of interviews, but if I appear in the House or Senate, I write my own testimony and speeches. I really depend on it, if I dictate a memo or write a letter. You think of what you put in a letter in this litigious society."

She's also familiar with public relations skills. A warm handshake, a perpetual smile and a winning voice convince people she encounters that Mary Turkington is glad to see them.

And Turkington has ample time to greet people. A recent typical day included a 9 a.m. House tax committee meeting, a 10:45 a.m. House of Representatives meeting, and a quick lunch with her KMCA governmental relations director, Tom Whitaker, to review upcoming Congressional bills. Then, after another committee meeting at the Statehouse, Turkington attended a 3 p.m. insurance meeting, a 4 p.m. interview, a 5:30 p.m. reception, which was followed by another reception and then a gumbo feed with the legislators.

If that weren't enough, Turkington would round out the evening with research and dictating answers to the day's mail.

No wonder her golf game has suffered. Turkington researches bills that affect the trucking industry. Highway, tax, driver's license, insurance and mandatory drug testing bills concern her.

She's particularly interested in House bill 20-14, which would provide revenue to build highways. Being a member of the "third house," as lobbyists are sometimes called, Turkington gets a chance to learn about the details of particular bills from her

fellow lobbyists.

"They'll tell you their major concerns. The education people are worried about having enough money for the education system," Turkington said. "I'm a member of the KU Development Committee, so I know about trying to find money for education. Personally, I think we'd better shape up on the education needs in this state."

Turkington feels there's room in the state budget for both highways and education.

While lobbying, Turkington said she has made lifelong friends.

"There's more hard work than glamor. But the pleasant part is you meet some of the finest people in the state. There aren't many communities in the state where you don't know someone. That's part of the reward."

Turkington banks on accuracy to remain credible as a lobbyist.

"If you provide information that's not accurate, you need to correct it, such as 'Yesterday I told you such-and-such, but I've since learned that's not true.' There's no penalty for saying you don't know the answer. But there's a terrific penalty for

not being truthful. You've destroyed your personal integrity."

Turkington said she expects legislators to be truthful with her as well.

"We expect people to be reciprocal with truth. I never ask a legislator, 'Will you support this bill?' But I will ask if he understands it and to support it if he can."

Turkington said she had no respect for legislators who led her to believe they not only understood the bill but would support it, when in reality, they would not vote for it.

"I have much more respect for the legislator who says, 'I understand, but I can't support it.'"

Turkington has learned much since her first legislative session in 1951, when she was named assistant managing director of KMCA. When she was promoted to managing director in 1968, she was only one of

two women who held such state positions in the country.

Even so, Turkington denies that she broke down barriers for women. She says she simply followed the example set by her parents.

She was reared on a family farm near Girard, where her parents worked as equals.

"Dad depended on Mom. There were four kids. It was never 'mine' and 'yours.' It was always 'ours.' I never knew there was any other way, except to work hard and do your darnedest."

After she started working for KMCA, Turkington soon learned that members of the trucking industry were people much like her parents.

"There were a lot of Mom-and-Pop operations. There was Mom, who kept the books and answered the phone. There were a lot of women involved in conventions. We think of trucking as a man's world, but there have been many partners/owners who were women."