

Announcer (00:02)

You're listening to the Safety Moment podcast by Utility Safety Partners. Safety is always a good conversation and it's a click away. Here's your host, Mike Sullivan.

Mike Sullivan (00:15)

Hi everybody. Welcome back to the Safety Moment podcast. I'm your host, Mike Sullivan. Thanks for joining us and episode number 71. I really can't believe we've got to this place, but here we are.

100 is within our, within view here. So looking forward to continuing the journey to 100 podcasts. My guest today is my colleague, Ms. Kassi Zaba. Kassi has been with Utility Safety Partners and Alberta OneCall before that for quite some time. Actually, I think we both joined together and you'll hear us talk about that in a few moments. And she is currently our manager of stakeholder relations.

~ something that we've desperately needed to do to bring all of that work into one area of governance. And ~ we're going to be talking about a lot of the things that we do at USP to reach out to the public, to our members, the digging community, to promote awareness of, you know, look up and live, damage prevention, click before you dig, and a lot more. Hey, Kassi, we've been talking about doing this for

I don't know, quite a while.

Kassi Zaba (01:30)

It's true, it's finally happening, which is exciting.

Mike Sullivan (01:33)

It's finally happening. Well, you I know you've been chomping at the bit and I kept having to move you back. But no, seriously, thanks for doing this. I know it's outside your comfort zone, but that's okay. ~ We do a lot of things stakeholder relations wise. And ~ I wanted to

take this time to really talk about it with you. mean, your role is, it's not new, but it's not old in your role of manager stakeholder relations. And we established it because

Well, plain and simple, we needed it. You know, we have 860 ish members. come and go with divestitures and that type thing. But yeah, it's a lot of members and that's only one of our stakeholder areas. So I'm glad that you're in the role. I'm glad we get to talk about it today. Before we get into any of that, you've been with Alberta One Call and Utility Safety Partners now for about as long as I have, maybe a little longer. Is that right?

Kassi Zaba (02:31)

think we both came on board with Alberta One Call in the same year. So we're both at 14 years now, which is hard to believe.

Mike Sullivan (02:39)

I just had actually, I think of it now, I just passed my 14th year a couple of days ago. I was the end of May when I came in 2011. Wow. This is the longest I've been employed anywhere, by the way. Yeah, so yeah, this is the longest I've been anywhere. I was, and I know you've heard me say it before, I was going to stay five years, but you know what? It's been interesting. And part of the interesting element of that's kept me

Kassi Zaba (02:55)

We're the same that way.

Mike Sullivan (03:09)

engage and meaningfully, sorry, meaningfully engaged is stakeholder relations. You know, as I said a couple of seconds ago, we have 850, 160 members only in Alberta, but you know, we have members technically in other provinces as well. But the stakeholders of everything we do that rely on our process rely on the damage prevention process rely on our services.

They're far more broad than that. ~ until really, until we established your new role as manager, stakeholder relations, the all of that was housed here and there, you know, it wasn't hodgepodge, but it was kind of hodgepodge. And bringing you into this role has really solidified that but it was a bit of a journey before you got here. So when you came to Alberta OneCall in 2011, you were one of our agents.

Kassi Zaba (04:05)

I yeah. I started on the phones, taking the calls. Phones. Even that has changed so much since 2011.

Mike Sullivan (04:09)

the phones.

And not just us, I mean, we were probably instrumental in pushing the change, obviously with our own stakeholders here, but that has changed pretty much everywhere in Canada anyway, and it's changing in the US too. And you were in that role for a little while, a couple of years anyway, before you went to member services, right?

Kassi Zaba (04:36)

Yeah,

just a little bit over a year, actually. And then ~ I moved over to member services where I worked closely with the utility owners who are registered with us. So one of the stakeholders.

Mike Sullivan (04:46)

one of those stakeholders. I routinely, not to embarrass you, but I routinely to this day get very positive and solid feedback on your role with member services and now in your new role. for you and everybody else in member services, Dana, Chelsea, and Tasha, routinely get positive feedback from our members saying, those people in that group,

there's nothing they can't do and they seem to be able to do it effortlessly. that's a real testament to, you know, yourself, obviously, I'm talking to you today, but everybody in that role. And we have to be responsive. We have to be able to, well, in some cases, work a little bit of magic with those members to keep things moving. And we've had so many changes to our operations, to our services, that member services has been

really relied upon an instrumental in helping us get that word out. What are some of the ways, like looking at member services, what are some of the big changes or the big efforts you saw when you were in member services? You know, the big changes we dealt with.

Kassi Zaba (05:59)

Yeah, well, when I started out in member services, the primary member that we were working with is the utility companies and the facility owners registered with the OneCall service. And I remember our very first big change was moving away from fax transmissions. We faxed those locate notifications to the locators. ~ that was, I think that was one of our first big steps to shifting online, both call before you dig to click before you dig, but also

getting rid of fax transmissions.

Mike Sullivan (06:31)

If I remember correctly, we were down to like less than 5 % or something like that of faxes when we dropped it. I remember the hesitation, the trepidation, my God, this is going to ruin us and yet it was a big bowl of nothing.

Kassi Zaba (06:45)

It was stressful at the time, but yeah, we navigated it and moved everyone online.

Mike Sullivan (06:51)

And here we are, you know, a decade later, what's the facts? I mean, it was, yeah. Yeah. And well, then we had a series of other changes. So software changes, obviously going from,

um, uh, Tel dig to Pelican Corp. And before that we had earth to tell, tell dig. Those are big efforts too. mean, when we are managing a wholesale software change, what impact does that have on our members?

Kassi Zaba (07:18)

The impact is huge because even like the way the ticket looks when they receive it, the information that they navigate to respond to that locate request, it's all different. And then each move to a new software introduce new technologies, which ~ better damage prevention because we can give more accurate information, especially that map piece. But that affects everything that the locator does to respond to that locate notification and all of the information they have to process.

and their internal ~ workflows as well. So it was huge.

Mike Sullivan (07:53)

Yeah, and we did it three times. Hopefully not again while I'm here.

Mike Sullivan (07:58)

it

won't be no I can't foresee a change coming that's for sure but I think where we are now know vis-a-vis the members and our software and processes I don't think it's ever been more streamlined than it is today would you say that

Kassi Zaba (08:13)

I

agree. Yeah. Yeah. And that's really all the new technologies that are out there and us taking advantage of that and using them. It's definitely streamlined it and made it easier both for member services, but also for our stakeholders.

Mike Sullivan (08:26)

And again, shifting from calls to clicks, no faxes to calls to clicks. That has I mean, it didn't come easy. You know, we didn't snap our fingers. But there was a point in time. And I think now it's like over five years ago where we mandated calls to clicks for members and contractors. And that, was kind of it kind of felt like the whole shift of the facts, you know, getting rid of that. We weren't getting rid of the phone, obviously, but.

we kind of were for some stakeholders. What impacted that or I guess not so much the impact, but how did that go and how did we manage that from your perspective?

Kassi Zaba (09:07)

It was definitely tricky. ~ I know even me, I'm a creature of habit. So if I'm used to phoning and speaking to that person, shifting to going online, it could be a little bit scary. And so ~ I think that's where a lot of the hesitation came from. by ~ hosting webinars and giving people that step-by-step walkthrough, showing them how to do it and having all of those tools readily available, I think it made it more of a comfortable transition.

And now most people prefer going online.

Mike Sullivan (09:39)

Yeah, it certainly seems that way. was a, I obviously we didn't, again, just snap our fingers and do it. There was a strategy around it. And we had to sell it internally. We had to be comfortable that what we were going to do was going to make sense. And, but I know some of our members out there, they were concerned because, hey, we're in rural areas. You know, we don't have a solid wifi. And I don't think that's really a concern anymore. I haven't heard that in a long time. Is that what you're hearing or not hearing?

Kassi Zaba (10:08)

No, I don't hear that as much anymore. I also heard that in the beginning. I think having that web form ~ compatible with mobile devices was a big step because even if you don't have strong Wi-Fi, you have that cell phone service and you can still use your cell phone service to request a locate on your phone. And it's just as easy as going to the computer and doing it on your computer. So I think that was a big step that we took making the website mobile compatible.

And that helped alleviate some of those problems.

Mike Sullivan (10:39)

Now getting into more of the, now you shifted to stakeholder relations and you know if I look back, if I look back at Alberta OneCall in those early days and we started to promote the web and I look back you know we were, we had billboards right, the static billboards and we had bus boards you know the bus bench boards, we had newspaper ads, we had radio.

But not a lot of digital in the early days. had our, just started our social media at the time was Twitter and Facebook, and now we've migrated to Instagram and LinkedIn. ~ but it was, we were, we were kind of catching up in, in some regards because, the, the education awareness efforts, for promoting awareness was really those old static billboards and whatnot. And yeah, we were proud of them. Hey, we, here's our new brand because we changed our, our logo and stuff. But.

Moving to online, the digital platform has been a journey and radio obviously was a big piece of our campaign. You've seen a lot of changes there and how do you find it today compared to what we used to do? And what have we dropped?

Kassi Zaba (11:58)

The billboards is a big one. was thinking about that this morning on my morning commute to the office. I would see our billboard every morning and you just don't see that anymore.

But with the shift to digital, we're reaching more people because that billboard was only being seen by people who drove on that street. Exactly. And while that's effective for those people, we're not reaching

Mike Sullivan (12:17)

the same people all the time.

Kassi Zaba (12:23)

people in Albertans in other areas. And I think that's where the shift to digital is really, really beneficial because we are reaching all Albertans, rural, ~ urban. You don't have to be in Calgary driving down that street to hear the click before you take message.

Mike Sullivan (12:38)

I remember getting phone calls from time to time from, you know, people who lived in rural areas saying, Hey, your billboard out here is a mess. You know, it's, it's blowing around in the wind and it's, it's now January and nobody's picked it up. Nobody's repaired it. It's okay. We had to get it a hold of the company and they'd go out there and take it down or whatever. But we don't have to worry about things like that. You know, the, the impressions we get, obviously, you know, I see the report. We got a report yesterday.

from our provider and ~ the cost per impression is dramatically low. And as you said, it reaches so many Albertans. I'll get someone in my family members saying, hey, I saw your ad, I was on my phone, I saw it, I never thought you guys did that. So yeah, we do a lot of that. And clearly that we're able to penetrate the market. What do you know about geofencing and how does that work? Because with that, we can target areas, right?

Kassi Zaba (13:35)

Can, yeah. So I understand the basics of how it works. I'm not that well versed. ~

Mike Sullivan (13:41)

Same here.

That's why we have contractors that help us out. it's interesting that the fact that we can actually target an area.

Kassi Zaba (13:51)

We can, and ~ we can target an audience based on their interests as well. And so one of the shifts we did a few years ago is actually targeting gamers, people who are online gaming, because that's an audience we hadn't specifically looked at before. And those are going to be people who are working in their yards or might be a contractor as a profession. And I think that was really beneficial and a new market that

might not have been that readily available without the digital campaign.

Mike Sullivan (14:21)

And again, the reporting back to us, we get information almost immediately. If we want it right to see who demographics is, you know, male, female age groups, ~ even professions, we get a bit of an idea there as to who we're reaching and who that campaign is reaching. And we're able to tailor it, you know, for a couple of years, we did ~ a campaign, an online campaign with Atco.

And the objective, I remember the objective was to migrate people online. And we were able to do that. And one of the representatives from ATCO actually won an award, was recognized for that by the Canadian Gas Association. So this is, I don't think any billboard campaigns were ever recognized. There was, not to say that things in the past weren't good, they're very good for the time, but you have to keep moving, right? And even this podcast, for example.

You know, I remember when I was approached by stories and strategies and say, you know, Mike, you should have a podcast. What for? it was, well, it was during COVID, okay, you know, our ability for outreach was limited, was compromised. Let's try this. Okay, let's try it.

And here, I think, maybe you know better than I do, I think this is episode 71. I'm blown away by that, episode 71, we've actually done this many, but.

And this, you how fitting to have you be on this episode or any episode to talk about outreach. And one of the other things we did a couple of years back, and I think it may have been during COVID, was our newsletter. And, you know, I see the stats of how many recipients there are. Well over 100,000 recipients of that newsletter. But what's even more impressive is the open rate.

We're close to 50 % open rate for that newsletter and you know, reaching 80,000 Albertans. I think there's 160,000 recipients of that newsletter. And I know it's a challenge for everybody to get that article into us, but I don't think any other notification center in Canada has that number or has that outreach just for the newsletter.

And the cost of it is virtually zero. It doesn't cost as much at all.

But beyond that, so we have, you know, digital, we have our campaign, education campaign, the outreach with the podcast, as I mentioned, we have the newsletter, but then we also have Boots on the Ground, which is also somewhat unique. And before you were in this role of, really capturing all of the education awareness efforts and the relations that are stakeholders, you were managing the ~ ambassadors and it kind of fell on your lap.

I don't remember how exactly that happened. I'm afraid to even ask the question because I think the finger may be pointed back at me, it is.

Kassi Zaba (17:32)

came, knocked on my door and said, how would you like to work with the ambassadors?

Mike Sullivan (17:36)

I knew

you would be chomping at the bit so you know there would be no hesitation but no seriously is that what happened?

Kassi Zaba (17:41)

Yes, but it is one of my favorite parts of my job is working with our ambassadors. They're a lovely group of people. They just have so much knowledge. They all have a background from within industry. And so they have all this knowledge about damage prevention and safety and what's happened over the years and where we're going now.

them going out and reaching community members and having that one-on-one conversation and building that relationship, I think that's one of the most valuable pieces of outreach that we have.

Mike Sullivan (18:13)

I Let's talk about the guys individually because right now they are all guys and you we can have ladies at some point and we may, who knows. But you know we have we started with the ambassador in Calgary that was the first one I believe and then we had the Edmonton area ambassador as well. Well let's start from where we are well today we have an ambassador in Grand Prairie and who is that?

Kassi Zaba (18:34)

Dave, Dave Eason, his background is from at CoGas and he looks after Grand Prairie and all of the surrounding areas.

Mike Sullivan (18:43)

And his vehicle was one of our donated vehicles, which is interesting in itself, right? We've been able to, most of our vehicles, anyway, they have been donated by our members and an in-kind donation. And so we have Dave up in Grand Prairie and then in Edmonton we have...

Kassi Zaba (18:59)

John Van Domsler, and he was actually one of our original ambassadors. He has been an ambassador since the program started up in Edmonton.

Mike Sullivan (19:07)

And he's formerly Telus, right?

So he has a long damage prevention history with Telus.

Kassi Zaba (19:13)

Yes,

I believe he worked for AGT before it was TELUS.

Mike Sullivan (19:17)

~

wow. yeah, that's yeah. And then also we have Terry.

Kassi Zaba (19:22)

Terry,

Terry Emsley, he was also a former ATCO employee and he looks after the Edmonton metropolitan region. So all of those areas surrounding Edmonton where it's very pipeline heavy.

Mike Sullivan (19:35)

It is, yeah. And I think the demographics there, as we've talked about, they really demand presence. And so I'm glad we have him there. And Terry is interesting. He's gotten to know Terry quite a bit over the years, and John and others. Terry, I never realized this artistic flair he has in background. And he almost treats the ambassador education awareness efforts

as part of his new canvas. You ever find that? So his posts and that type of thing? And I think the other guys are like, damn you, Terry, you're making us look bad, but he, he's not, he's making everybody look really good. Is that, how I see it anyway.

Kassi Zaba (20:17)

Yes, I enjoy seeing his social media posts because there's always a new creative flair to them.

Mike Sullivan (20:22)

Yeah, and every one of these guys is a fountain of knowledge. Then we come down, one of our newer ambassadors as well, along with Grant Prairie, is basically in Red Deer, central Alberta, right? That's what we call it.

Kassi Zaba (20:34)

Central

Alberta, it's quite a large area, actually. That's Jim Worawa. And Jim was with FortisAlberta before he came over to Utility Safety Partners. And yeah, it goes Rocky Mountain House over to Drumheller, ~ up north of La Combe and Stetler. It's a large central Alberta.

Mike Sullivan (20:55)

But again, it's quite a swath of pipelines and everything else too. But, you know, in Alberta we have, in terms of pipeline companies, dysregulated by the province is about 700 different companies. And by the feds, it's about, I'm not sure if they're all in Alberta, but

probably most of them, it's about 100 different companies. And they're not all the, know, the pipelines that go from

coast to coast. A lot of these pipelines, they just cross the provincial boundaries, the sausage links, that type thing. But where Jim is, there's a tremendous amount of pipeline, a lot of activity. ~ The communities are growing all the time. And then we come down to Calgary and we have my old colleague from the National Energy Board, the CER, Kent Rowden. He's one of our newer ones. I guess he's really not that new anymore.

Kassi Zaba (21:53)

He started in the role in 2023. So one of our newer ambassadors. But yes, he has the background knowledge in pipeline regulation, which is interesting because no one else in our team has that background. And so it really brings a good perspective to the ambassador team and really helps us answer the questions for all facets of utility safety.

Mike Sullivan (22:16)

And interesting, now, the vehicle that was in Calgary, and it was our first, I think, our first donated vehicle from TC Energy. And it got ~ aged out recently. And we had an opportunity, we kind of fell in our lap. The Alberta Energy Regulator, approached us with a creative sentence, which is really for us, came out of left field. And that allowed us to purchase, to actually purchase a vehicle this time.

Mike Sullivan (22:45)

because that TC energy truck had been aged out. And so that was added to the fleet. I know to Kent's happiness, he was actually able to drive something that he felt like was a good investment. And I agree. And so that was an interesting element. Now, the creative sentence is kind of interesting too. And I'm to talk about that a little bit. And you'll recall when this came for attention that I had been looking for ages.

for a mechanism to secure creative sentences for legislation that we were working on. And there really didn't seem to be any kind of enacting authority that allowed us to do that. So

when this fell in our lap, ~ was great in one regard that we actually had this ability to buy a new vehicle, a newer vehicle. ~ But the fact that...

it also enlightened me as to where this enacting authority was for creative sentencing was even more interesting to me. Now we haven't used that yet, but it remains in our back pocket that, you know, whatever happens with legislation, ~ that this enacting authority is there. So that was kind of a really neat twist. And if we had never had the ambassador program, I don't think we would have even learned of that. So I,

which is interesting itself. Now we go further south again and we have our newest ambassador.

Kassi Zaba (24:13)

Yes, ~ Stu, Stu Perkus. He's formerly with the City of Lethbridge Electrical Department. And he'll be starting up this month. His area is Lethbridge and southern Alberta.

Mike Sullivan (24:26)

So

that brings us a total of six, right? Or five? Six. Six. If I can do my math. So we went from really 10 years ago, no ambassadors at all, no boots on the ground. Today we have six. And one of the reasons we were able to do that, again, we go back to shifting from fax to calls to clicks. And we've been able to reduce the number of people in the contact center.

You know, there was way back, I think when I started here, when you started here, that contact center was minimum 50 people, minimum. And that was only for Alberta. And then, you we began providing services to Manitoba and later on Saskatchewan and for a little while, British Columbia. But we never went over 60, I don't think, even when we had, you know, the four provinces we were providing services to. We go online, we reduce capacity in the contact center.

And we just shifted some of those resources, not all of them, but some of those financial resources to boots on the ground to compliment everything we've done, whether it's digital or whatever we're doing today.

Charity Safety Partners is hosting its first ever charity golf tournament on September 9th 2025 at the Hamptons Golf Club in Calgary. The event is going to be in support of BC and Alberta Guide Dogs and we are looking to host up to 144 golfers at the event and also we have a number of sponsorship opportunities. This is a fun golf tournament and we're rewarding a hole-in-one

recipient if you get one with \$5,000 in cash and your green fee includes not only the tournament but bagged lunch, a welcome bag gift, 18 holes of golf, power carts, driving range practice use and a beautiful dinner, 10 ounce AAA steak dinner following the tournament. I hope you'll sign up, I hope you'll bring others with you and if you're looking to sponsor the event just go to our website

under utilitysafety.ca, events, and select charity golf tournament to learn more.

The digging season is our focus. If we look at the year as a cycle, how are you in your role? How are you preparing for the digging season? We have our trade shows, we have a variety of things that we do in the off season, I'll call it. But this is because people aren't digging with...

The quantity that they do during the digging season doesn't mean we're our foot's off the gas education awareness-wise. So, let me through that a little bit. How is your year created in terms of your role?

Kassi Zaba (27:21)

Yeah, so if we start at the beginning of the digging season in April, that's when a lot of our campaigns really kick off because that's when homeowners are going to start working in the yards, capital projects are going to spin up, a lot of the excavation is starting. And so that's when our ambassador season starts and those boots on the ground come out. That's when our digital campaign really ramps up and people start seeing our advertisements online.

But that's also because April is Dix Safe Month, that's when we host a lot of our in-person events as well. And so just this past year, we had our safety conference and ~ we also hosted a number of safety breakfasts in regional areas around the province. And so April really is the kickoff of when we're the busiest for outreach. And then that continues throughout the summer with our digital campaign, with the ambassadors.

visiting all the sites throughout the province and ~ kind of plateaus a little bit because crews are busy, everyone's busy throughout the summer. And then it really picks up again for autumn because everyone wants to get their work done before the snow flies. So that's again when ~ you're more likely to see our advertisements, we're pushing them out further. The ambassadors are going to sites, they're often doing safety presentations in the fall ~ just to kind of answer questions that

people might have come across while they were working all summer and also get them ready for the next season. And then after fall coming to winter is when things typically seem to quiet down. There's not as much excavation, but that's when we're preparing for next year. So we're trying to see ~ where we should have more events in the upcoming year. Find those communities where outreach would be beneficial, where we can host a safety breakfast and talk about click before you dig and what's happening.

with utility safety. And so throughout the winter is a lot of planning.

Mike Sullivan (29:19)

but there's also you touch on a little bit, but maybe expand a little bit on it, too. But there's also what we refer to as the assessment of effectiveness. And, you know, we we look at and

this isn't just done in one week or something like that. But you've built in an assessment of effectiveness process for everything we do. And then really at year's end, you're assessing all of those elements into one. ~

Mike Sullivan (29:46)

I want to call it a report, but you're planning for the following year, a lot of it based on those assessments of effectiveness.

Kassi Zaba (29:54)

Yes, and a lot of it is we have such a broad spectrum of stakeholders that we want to make sure that we're reaching everyone and talking to everyone. So we're assessing ~ how effective the outreach was for each stakeholder group, where there might have been some gaps, and ~ making sure that we're spreading the right message as well because click before you dig, everyone knows to click before you dig.

But with the unification with Just and with the ABCGA, we're now promoting overhead power line safety as well. And we want to make sure that that message is going out to all of the right stakeholders. So that assessment effectiveness is both on message, but also on audience and making sure that we're reaching everyone that we can.

Mike Sullivan (30:41)

And you you mentioned overhead power lines and yet that did change when we unified.

And now the look up and live application is coming and you know, we're a little lower, a little slower than we want to be for some logistics stuff, but it is coming and that'll be a new element to promote a new, well, not a new stakeholder group, but maybe a more focused stakeholder group to roll this out and see how it's being used, potentially tweak it as we go, because we were doing a bit of a soft launch first and there'll be a hard launch a little later on.

But how do you see that application? know, we've been so hyper-focused for decades on the safety of bird utilities and working around them. And now, for the first time, the Alberta OneCall people are looking up. And ~ we've had this objective when we unified, and we've done quite a bit of work in this area. But this is probably the biggest change or the biggest

effort in terms of promoting awareness of overhead power lines. ~ What are you hearing, if anything, so far about the application?

Kassi Zaba (31:54)

People are very excited about it, actually, and that's something that the ambassadors are already raising awareness about as they're making those site visits. And what they're telling me is people are looking forward to it. They love the idea of an app where they can just go and see where those power lines are and then have the resources at their fingertips to plan accordingly.

they'll know which power line provider to reach out to if they need to get within the seven meters. And ~ yeah, it's already pretty highly anticipated just with the little bit of promotion that's out there.

Mike Sullivan (32:26)

I can't imagine, you know, we've been providing services for bird utilities safety for decades. And now we're starting with this application for look up and live. I can't imagine five years, 10 years time where that'll be. And ~ I won't be here to see it. That'll be after I'm gone, but I'm anxious to see and keep tabs on where this can go because I think it can be extremely effective. You know, if you look at the number of

contacts there are with overhead power lines and the number of damages to buried utilities and the efforts for both, you know, in terms of awareness and education and preventing of damage or contacts. I think we're just grazing the surface of the overhead assets and preventing contacts. So really excited to see how this can reduce those contacts.

And we're again, I think we're just in our infancy here. We're just starting and there's, there seems to be some hesitation with, with some of our members. And I get that something new is always, always a challenge to, to absorb and move with. But again, you look at getting rid of the faxes, migrating calls to clicks, all those things. was hesitation, ~ you know, new software, there was hesitation. You know, I, I've heard, you know, Mike Sullivan, he's off the rails. What's he doing?

And you have to really be married to your convictions and you have to obviously do your homework, but this is going to work. This will be better. And with every change we've made, I have seen an improvement in the damage prevention process, an improvement in reducing damages. For example, the alternate locate provider, that is something that as of right now, there are roughly 20,000 excavations since August 1st that

where the excavator chose the ALP process and to our knowledge, not one damage. I mean, that is monumental and needs to be celebrated and we're hesitating. Of course, there will be a damage someday. It's inevitable. ~ But to have 20,000 excavations without any damages, that is phenomenal. And I think we're going to see that with other elements of what the services we provide.

Kassi Zaba (34:50)

I agree. It always has to have that slow start and that slow build up. But I see the ALP program picking up and becoming more widely used. I see the Look Up and Live app growing and being widely used as well. I think it'll be as much of a tool as Click Before You Dig is. And these things have to start slow, but there's definitely room for growth.

Mike Sullivan (35:12)

always hesitation and you can't, I you have to keep moving forward. I think you know me by now. You always have to keep moving forward. ~ Not too fast because people are gonna, they'll get wary. You're going too fast. But at some point when you're in that journey of moving forward, you do stop walking and you start jogging and then you start sprinting. There is that time when you do it and you say, know what, the bus is going man, we gotta keep going.

We're not quite there yet with look up and live. And that's okay. That's okay. One of the things I want to talk to you about before we get into a few other things was, was the public awareness paradox. And I think you've heard me talk about this before, and this is where, you know, we are on a very, from a very large perspective, whether it's from a regulatory element or just the best practice element, we promote awareness of the location of buried utilities and then now overhead assets.

And yet, there may be that may be in contradiction with security management programs that are designed to protect the public from nefarious objectives. Now, how do you see that? Because, you know, we I've been you know, people have said, well, you know, yes, we promote awareness of where this utility is, or that utility is, and how to work safely near it. And yet,

~ What if somebody used that information against us? Well, yeah, it could happen. ~ But it's not an easy answer. Where do you see? How do you see the benefit of promoting awareness, but you managing that line?

Kassi Zaba (36:57)

That is by the way to throw it. Yeah.

Mike Sullivan (36:57)

That's a tough question.

It is, it is.

Kassi Zaba (37:02)

No, there is obviously a possibility that someone could use that for nefarious reasons, but I think the chance of that happening is a lot lower than the chance of a catastrophic event because someone struck a line, whether it's overhead or underground. And so I think just

weighing the risks against the benefits, it's beneficial to promote these location services to make sure everyone is safe because that will have a bigger positive impact.

than that one nefarious act that may happen.

Mike Sullivan (37:35)

And like you said, chances are it won't. I mean, and there are so many other elements of whether it be pipeline or utility operations programs that are designed to detect those nefarious elements, right? And whether even outside of our industry, whether it be the RCMP or CSIS or, you know, they are constantly monitoring.

what is happening from a security management perspective. Yet I'm sure they are looking at our education program saying, why do they do this? But we have to, right? mean, there's an element, we have to live and work safely near these utilities and certainly promote. ~ no, it's an area that I sometimes, if I start to think about it, it's a challenge because in some cases you do have competing legislation.

you know, whether it's security management or education awareness. Stepping back now, or stepping back into, know, specifically your role. Now, last year, the year before, how long you've been in this role? Is it, this is your third year?

Kassi Zaba (38:47)

As manager of stakeholder relations, I'm in my second year.

Mike Sullivan (38:50)

Second year, okay. But you know, it a bit of a slow migration. Now you do have an administrator as well, Ben King, and he's been able to take a lot of the load from you, which was absolutely necessary. And I know you don't give him all the crappy work because that's not you. That's not what you would do. But you mentioned that one of the best parts of your job is working with the ambassadors. What's an area of your job that you think is one of the hardest to do?

Not that you don't like it, but it's one of the hardest to do.

Kassi Zaba (39:22)

Good question.

Mike Sullivan (39:23)

That's a tough one because you tend to do everything really, really well.

Kassi Zaba (39:26)

the hardest ones to do. I guess that's just on a personal level. I don't think it's a difficult part of the job, but ~ organizing all the various events that we host can sometimes be tricky because there are so many moving pieces, so many involved stakeholders. ~ I find that challenging sometimes, but I think that's just a personal thing for me. It's not, it's not like it's a hard part of the job.

Mike Sullivan (39:50)

Well,

you're very thorough, right? mean, this is part of why you're in the role that you're in, is you're very thorough. And, you know, as the saying sometimes goes, if you want something done, give it to the busy person because they're busy for a reason, they get things done. And you're one of those people. And we're lucky to have a number of people like that. But you're clearly one of those people at Utility Safety Partners. ~ And this year, we're rolling out something new.

our golf tournament. This is really new, really new. But how is that going?

Kassi Zaba (40:25)

As much as organizing events is challenging sometimes, I'm actually really excited about our golf tournament. It's this September, September 9th, and it's our first charity event where we are raising money for a local charity. And this year we selected BC and Alberta Guide Dogs as our charity of choice. So I'm looking forward to it. It's already coming together really nicely. It's going to be a lot of fun.

for people who want to come out and golf with us. yeah, it supports a great cause.

Mike Sullivan (40:55)

And kind of cool too how we selected BC and Alberta guide dogs. We did a survey internally and was it predominantly the contact center that got to choose that or was it everybody? I can't remember.

Kassi Zaba (41:07)

All of the staff got to have their say in which charity we selected and it was BC and Alberta Guide Dogs that was the most voted on. So that was our, that's everyone, that's our contact center agents who are on the phones, that's team leaders, administration, everyone got a say, which was nice. Even you, even you Mike.

Mike Sullivan (41:23)

Even me. Even

me. And I don't pull rank or anything. Even me. No, that's good. Yeah, we're looking forward to it. You know, we've been hosting a golf tournament for our board members and the committee chairs for many, many years. And ~ for a number of years have been, well, how come you're not doing this on a broader scale? And well, here we go. And we're, I'm excited about it too. Now, one of the things that we do as well is our industry awards. And this is fairly new. We've done this twice.

We had our 40th anniversary and safety conference in Banff and that was, you know, we're doing our conference every two years, but because of the celebration we did it that year.

And then we did our event this year again in Edmonton, at the Edmonton Ice District. And that was well attended too. And I heard great feedback, but both those events, we had an opportunity to recognize

recognize industry recipients of those awards. So the locator of the year, the member of the year, and the excavator of the year. Now next year, we don't have a conference because we're back onto our regular two-year cadence every two years. So how are we going to manage that?

Kassi Zaba (42:34)

That's a great question. ~ We'll definitely be honoring the recipients through some type of event. I suspect we might put it in with the charity golf tournament, ~ but who knows? Maybe we'll have a different event specifically for that.

Mike Sullivan (42:52)

I think the golf tournament might be a great time to do that. ~ I will see. that's again, I don't pull rank. I just, I hear the ideas and I support whichever way staff wants to go. What do you see now you're much younger than I am. What do you see a utility safety partners looking like? Not just from a stakeholder relations perspective, but if you were to look and you've been around, the reason why I'm asking this question, you've, you've seen the organization, the operations from different

perspectives. You know, as a newbie agent many years ago to member services, you're one of our senior leaders now within utility safety partners. Where do you see us going in five to 10 years? When you think about it, where do see that going?

Kassi Zaba (43:40)

I know we've said this for years, but I really do see us being that information hub or communication hub because there's so many different working parts in safety and damage prevention, so many different stakeholders, so many different campaigns and moving parts, I guess, that I really see utility safety partners being that central hub and being

The resource that people can come to if they have any questions or concerns or want to provide feedback ~ will be that organization for them.

Mike Sullivan (44:15)

And we are blessed with people like yourself and, know, Joe Rosenberg and Tasha, Dana, Chelsea, Cher Kirk. I I'm not going to give justice to everybody, our team leaders. And we are blessed with so many extremely knowledgeable people and not knowledgeable on one thing, but a broad perspective of things. ~ That gives me a lot of confidence for the future and for right now, obviously, but for the future.

and we start to add things like look up and live, the alternate locate provider, even something as you know, an engagement element like the golf tournament. ~ I'm never worried about will this work? I know it will because the people we have working for us are so good and you're one of them. So Kassi, I know this is outside your comfort zone and ~ but I'm really glad we got a chance to do this. You've been a tremendous ~

boost to utility safety partners and to your team and to all of our members and I hear about it all the time ~ and ~ I just want to thank you for doing this with me and also thank you for for being the employee that you are you've you've just been ~ you've been a great benefit to all of us.

Kassi Zaba (45:30)

Thank It was outside my comfort zone, but it was really nice to sit down and talk with you. So thank you for inviting me.

Mike Sullivan (45:40)

things up on this episode of the Safety Moment podcast. I want to thank Cassius Ava for joining me and also thank our producer Stories and Strategies and I hope you choose to follow this podcast on any director listening on and please do leave a rating. You can follow

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