

Building the Future

for the Past 75 Years

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PART V



The first decade of the 21st century has been a time of tremendous change in the world. The pace of life has accelerated to a rate that would have been inconceivable to Frank Balfour and 13 peers, as they laid out the foundation for IRWA nearly 75 years ago. Could they have imagined where their fledgling association would be by now? The highways, roads and airports built, telecommunication systems installed, the pipelines sunk underground, the mass transit options created, all supporting the comforts of life in North America that we all take for granted today.

The decade brought with it many issues that would affect right of way agents – growing concerns about energy supplies, an explosion in telecommunications and the further integration of technology into everyday life, as well as a crippling recession by decades-end.

Investment in right of way projects has steadily increased in the 21st century. Since 2001, the average age of public infrastructure in Canada has been dropping, reaching 16.3 years in 2007, down from its peak of 17.5 at the start of the decade, according to a study conducted by Statistics Canada. This movement was invigorated by large investments in highways and roads in Quebec and Ontario. Similarly, in the last year there has been a widespread push in the United States to provide funding for public infrastructure projects, as a means for stimulating the economy following the recent economic downturn. The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 provided \$80.9 million to reinvest in public infrastructure manufacture and repair. It is impossible to downplay the importance of these investments countries with modern, safe and efficient infrastructure are more productive and more competitive on international markets. The ensuing economic growth results in an increase in quality of life.





Representatives from SARWA, Bobby Richardson (middle) and Carl Visser (right), sign an affiliation agreement with then-IRWA President, Dwight Pattison, SR/WA in June 2000.

Internal and External Growth

All in all, IRWA has spent the past decade perhaps even more committed than ever to its mission of providing quality education to its members. In the year 2000, IRWA reached an important milestone by breaking the \$1 million mark for income received in educational revenue. At the time, the Association was presenting over 350 classes annually and had registered over 7,500 students during the year.

IRWA was growing, not just at home in North America, but on the international level in particular. After their 1998 visit to the Annual Education Conferences in Minneapolis, representatives from the newly minted South African Right of Way Association (SARWA) were eager to join forces with IRWA as an affiliate association. At the Annual Conference in June 2000, IRWA's then-International President Dwight Pattison, SR/WA signed the agreement with SARWA Chair Bobby Richardson, thereby joining the two associations. Similarly in 2002, IRWA partnered with the Japan Compensation Consultant Association, making them the second official affiliate association of IRWA.

Keeping Apace

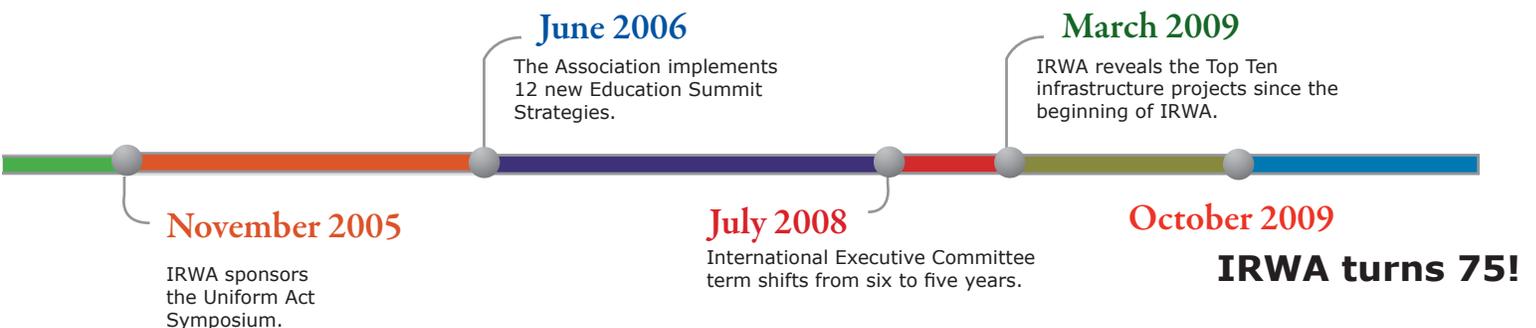
In the accelerated information age of the 2000s, the short shelf life of education soon became apparent. New technology and methods available to right of way professionals had to be learned and old skills constantly enhanced in order to stay relevant in the modern workplace.

A major education development spearheaded by the International Professional Development Committee provided for a comprehensive course revision and revamping program. The course revamping project was designed to adapt all IRWA courses into a standardized adult education format, in order to keep even the most advanced students engaged. In October 2002, the first online course was made available to members – Ethics and the Right of Way Profession. IRWA also worked to expand and improve its website, making it a valuable resource for members, enabling them to recertify faster with online courses.

The Association also understood its role in becoming more reactive to regulatory changes in helping members stay on top of the most current legislation pertaining to right of way. In 2005, revisions and regulations in implementing the Uniform Relocation Assistance and Real Property Acquisition Policies Act were adopted, and IRWA co-sponsored, along with the U.S. Department of Transportation's Federal Highway Administration, the 2005



IRWA and JCCA became affiliates during the Annual Conference in June 2002, signing the agreement with Alan Wurtz, SR/WA.





When the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in *Kelo v. City of New London* that eminent domain for economic development did not violate public use clauses in the State or U.S. constitutions, the scope of eminent domain law in many states changed drastically.

in the early years of the decade with this goal in mind. It simultaneously showed not only IRWA's continued commitment to its members, but also its rejuvenated goal of strengthening the right of way profession by increasing public awareness of IRWA. The plan also sought to cement IRWA's reputation as the premier provider of right of way education with a renewed commitment to strengthen education and online offerings.

Uniform Act Symposium. This comprehensive seminar proved to be an effective way to communicate complex changes, and paved the way for the Public Real Estate Education Symposium and the Federal Agency Update, both of which sought to bring together right of way professionals and federal agencies in order to share techniques and best practices for managing public real estate affected by the right of way process.

Leadership wanted membership in IRWA to be perceived as a real investment in each member's future. The IEC hoped to accomplish this through consensus-building regarding the vision and mission of the Association, creating forum for discussing strategies, promoting customer service through staff hiring and training, reviewing the governance structure to stimulate participation and interest and developing leadership training.

Inspiring the Populace

One challenge that IRWA has been facing this decade is a phenomenon all right of way practitioners are by now familiar with. The "graying of the industry" has had a significant effect on the profession, an effect which not only exists today but will continue in the foreseeable future. Now that the baby boom generation is entering retirement age, significant economic and demographic shifts are occurring in the workforce, and the right of way industry is perhaps particularly susceptible. New recruits entering the industry are in need of the myriad educational and networking opportunities available through membership in IRWA. This has led the Association to reach out to many new organizations, including universities, in hopes of educating young people about the diverse opportunities and careers available in right of way.

IRWA already provided the education, however in order to attract these new recruits, the Association realized it had to enhance its image and that of the right of way profession. The Association unveiled a new Strategic Plan

One of the major goals of the Strategic Plan arose because IRWA leadership had begun to feel the strain of taking on too many projects and commitments. To help advance the Association's mission and goals, the leadership would need to take a closer look at their priorities. How could they best execute all the projects and programs with its existing base of volunteers? Some volunteers felt the time commitment associated with being part of the IRWA leadership structure was too intense, and involvement began to lag. The IEC decided to streamline the governance structure, shortening the term of the Executive Committee Members from six years to five. The Committee also moved to expand the roles of region leaders, and created a new International Communications



Following the economic collapse and recession of 2008, U.S. President Barack Obama signed the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act on February 19, 2009, which dedicated \$80.9 billion dollars for infrastructure investment in the U.S.

“In another 75 years, a new legacy will exist for each and every right of way agent working today.”

and Marketing Committee. IRWA was also taking advantage of developing technological advancements like better conference calls, emailing, video conferences and online communications. As a result, less travel was required for member involvement.

Central to IRWA's goal of remaining the premier provider of right of way education was always improving and expanding on course offerings. At the Annual Conference in Sacramento, CA in 2007, then-President Dan Beardsley, SR/WA revealed the twelve initiatives which had evolved from the Education Foundations' Education Summit held the year before. These initiatives provided what would be considered the blueprint for the future of IRWA's education and professional development programs, the roadmap for taking these programs to the next level. This effort also increased collaboration between IRWA and the Education Foundations as it fostered an educational environment that encouraged chapters and regions to donate time and money proportionate to the increased benefits they received as a result of the partnership.

Building the Future

In the past 75 years, IRWA has grown from a group of fourteen right of way men in Los Angeles offering just one correspondence course to over 9,000 right of way professionals in the United States, Canada, as well as Japan and South Africa, through the two affiliate associations. The Association has expanded to 55 course offerings in subject matter geared toward both American and Canadian attendees, with more than 6,000 registered students and \$3 million in course revenue over the past year.

In 2006, the Dwight D. Eisenhower Interstate Highway System celebrated its 50th Anniversary.

Right of way agents helped in no small part to build this country, and building a solid reputation for the industry and Association is next. IRWA is taking large strides to fulfill this goal. The Association is looking to emerge as the century progresses, not just as a leader in educational opportunities for right of way professionals, but more as a professional association whose influence lends credence and prestige to a profession that is largely unknown to the general population. To accomplish this objective, IRWA has created new Branding Initiatives. While the concept first evolved at the Education Summit, it lately has taken on new energy, as the Association positions itself in becoming increasingly visible, collaborative and accessible. New benefits of membership are continually emerging, and leadership continues to foster new federal partnerships. Furthermore, the Association's birth month, October, was recently declared International Right of Way Month in the United States and IRWA's list of Top Ten Infrastructure Projects in North America generated 58 million media exposures!

What this Association has accomplished over the years is truly impressive, and what is even more exciting is the great promise this Association holds in the years to come. IRWA has adapted and survived through every imaginable obstacle over the course of its existence - recessions, depressions, flagging membership, declines in course attendance - and has come through stronger, and more prepared to face future challenges with verve. Birthdays, especially significant ones, are always a time for reflection, a time to consider the consequences and triumphs of past actions, and to think of what the future may hold. IRWA can now look back the past and see the legacy that was created by those fourteen original members - and in another 75 years, a new legacy will no doubt exist for each and every right of way agent working today. ✪

