

FOCUS ON

THE INTERNATIONAL PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE



Jack Borgmeyer, SR/WA, R/W-RAC, Chair of the International Professional Development Committee and 2005 Balfour Finalist, with Past President Gordon E. MacNair, SR/WA, at the 2005 Annual International Education Conference in Toronto, ON.

For over 70 years, IRWA has united the efforts of its members toward individual development, improved service to employers and the public, and advancement in the body of knowledge related to the professional tasks of its members.

As an Association comprised of right of way professionals, we collectively recognize the importance of obtaining and enhancing the technical skills required for this diverse and complex field. As a result, it is logical that our foundation is built upon a vigorous, continuing educational program.

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With over 60 courses on topics and activities affecting the right of way process, IRWA's professional development program is designed to better equip right of way professionals to play a significant role in community development. This is especially true with respect to the multitude of vital community, regional and national improvements, highways, flood control projects, public utility construction, pipelines, railroads, and all other public and quasi-public development activities. As the Association expands, so also does its program to unite the professional efforts of all right of way professionals toward the betterment of the conditions of the individual.

BY BARBARA BILLITZER



Committee Members from left: Jack Borgmeyer, SR/WA, R/W-RAC, Michael Pattison, SR/WA, James H. Finnegan, SR/WA, Patricia Petitto, SR/WA, Alan Morganfield, SR/WA, and W. Kyle Ray, SR/WA, P.E.

What is the overall responsibility of the IPDC?

Jack: The most important responsibility is to assure that IRWA courses maintain the highest quality standards and that they serve the needs of the Association's members. Toward this goal, we establish and monitor policy for administering educational courses, professional development programs and designation/certification requirements.

What is your greatest or most recent accomplishment?

Jack: Most recently, we spearheaded a comprehensive assessment of the qualifications of IRWA course instructors. For this initiative, we established a process where each current instructor could be thoroughly evaluated against specific adult learning criteria.

We also completed an audit of all current course materials. This was a massive undertaking. The Association's leaders and IPDC realized that the student and instructor manuals used many different formats, depending on the instructor or course developer. Our goal is to create consistent and effective educational tools that facilitate learning during the class as well as provide a valuable reference tool for use after the class. Following extensive meetings with various adult learning consultants, we selected an educational template that we believe will provide course participants with the most effective tools available.

What are your committee's greatest strengths?

Jack: There are three key strengths that come to mind.

First, we all share a common vision. We all strive to deliver the highest quality educational programs possible to our members and other course participants. We would not work as hard as we do if we did not strongly believe in the Association's overall mission. Our efforts often go unrewarded, as we are unable to please all of the members all the time. So we strive to do our best to address the major concerns of the entire Association. It's important for us to

stay focused on the big picture. While we will listen to the various viewpoints, we rely heavily on the industry committees for their expertise and input.

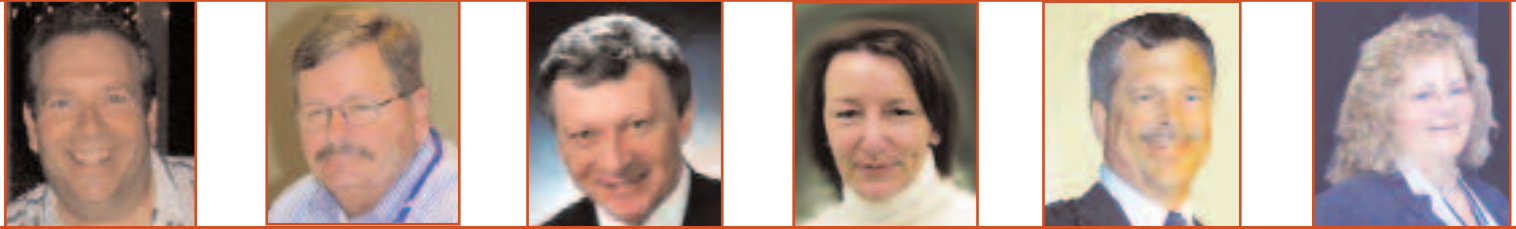
Next would be our collective dedication to the Association. Our committee is very fortunate to have such a dedicated group of professionals. Everyone gets involved and contributes. Even those who are no longer on the committee still provide us with support. It's amazing how much gets done through this type of collaboration.

Professional diversity is another strength. We are extremely lucky to have such a range of professional experience, educational background and work experience, including U.S. and Canadian representation. I believe these differences have made our committee even stronger. Regardless of the project or issue, we work together and stay focused on the Association's goals.

What is the committee's most immediate priority?

Jack: The Association has made a major commitment to taking our educational courses to the next level. To make this happen, we needed to assess our inventory. Do we have all the courses we need and are the ones we have the best courses or the best use of the Association's time and resources?

Since IRWA courses have been developed over many years by many different instructors with different approaches, each set of course materials you pick up is in a different format. Our goal is to make sure that the participant's manuals have the most relevant and up-to-date information and use consistent learning principles and format. As part of this effort, we will be challenging each course to determine if it meets the needs of our members. Over the next 18 months, our committee will make recommendations to the International Executive Committee (IEC) whether or not to keep the current course, change or modify it, or eliminate it. We have also asked all the International Committees to review the courses and let us know which ones need modification or updating and whether we need to add areas of instruction.



From left: Kevin Paul, SR/WA, Michael Quinn, SR/WA, Edward Opstein, SR/WA, R/W-NAC, R/W-RAC, Arlene MacKenzie, SR/WA, Stephen Hagen, SR/WA, and Valerie Fries, IRWA Director of Education & Professional Development

What an enormous undertaking! Who will be responsible for modifying the course content?

Jack: Following an extensive recruitment process, David Layne, SR/WA, of Layne Consulting Services, Inc., was selected. He will be responsible for adapting each IRWA course in accordance with the educational design template that the IPDC approved earlier this year. His intimate knowledge of our courses gained as an instructor, IPDC member and Principles of Right of Way editor provide him with a unique perspective and invaluable credentials. David will be working collaboratively with IRWA's committees, who will review courses within their area of expertise and identify other subject matter experts as needed for each course.

What are some of your current activities?

Jack: To say that our plate is full would be an understatement! Let's see...some of our other projects include the course coordinator training program, enhancing our web-based training materials, member marketing, and of course, finalizing programs for the 2006 annual conference scheduled for June 18-21 in Denver, CO. Additionally, we've launched some new educational updates in Right of Way magazine (starting with this issue), including an interview with a course developer who outlines specific reasons why a new course was needed.

What types of obstacles does your committee face?

Jack: The biggest challenge for us is finding people and subject matter experts for courses that need to be updated. While we consistently promote specific course opportunities through RFPs (Request for Proposals) and solicit responses from our members, instructors and other qualified experts, the process always seems to take longer than we would like.

Another obstacle is the lack of resources necessary to accomplish our goals. After all, this is a volunteer position. There is always a multitude of issues on the table at all the times, and we all have jobs to do, businesses to run. We are only able to meet face-to-face about

three times a year, so getting things done in a timely manner is another challenge.

There are so many things we want to do, but money and staff is lacking. We never seem to have enough resources to do all the things we want to achieve. It's hard to prioritize all these projects, as it means some projects will always fall to the bottom of the list.

What attracted you to this committee?

Jack: I knew that this committee provided critical learning tools for right of way professionals. In fact, our members rely on us for the core services we provide. I wanted to be part of something that made a difference to the Association. I think we do make a difference. However, I had no idea how much work this committee does!

The majority of what we do is never seen by the general membership. Once I got involved, I became instantly impressed by the amount of work this committee does. The IPDC members are extremely talented, and they continue to amaze me with their knowledge and expertise. I've never seen a more dedicated group of individuals.

How would someone interested get involved in the IPDC?

Jack: Unlike the other IRWA committees, all IPDC committee members are appointed by the Association's leadership. If someone is interested in becoming an IPDC member, they need to express their interest to the IEC members, who are responsible for appointing the members. There is only one representative from each region, and the IEC appoints new members as these regional openings become available.

How did you feel when the IEC appointed you to this committee?

Jack: It's very validating to be appointed by IRWA's International Executive Committee. It means the leaders of the Association trust us with an enormous mission. Focusing on the professional development needs of the members is our only priority. I know that each of us feels rewarded both personally and professionally.

What have you gained from your participation?

Jack: First of all, I gained a deeper understanding of the needs of our members. As I became more involved in the IPDC, I gained a better understanding and a great respect of what our organization does for its members. I gained enormous respect for all the committee members that served before me. I have gained respect for the headquarters staff who handle all the day-to-day work generated by the committees and the many volunteers who help establish the priorities. There's an incredible amount of work involved with serving the needs of over 9000 members. Ensuring that we are serving those needs effectively gives us great personal and professional satisfaction.

How many members serve on the IPDC?

Jack: The committee has two members who serve as Vice Chairs and must have at least two instructors on the committee. Committee members represent members within their regions and serve as a liaison for Chapters regarding IRWA professional and educational programs. They promote and administer these programs through participation at chapter and region meetings. Members work with the industry committees regarding course and professional program issues.

How often does your committee meet?

Jack: While we work together continuously via e-mail and phone, we are only able to meet face-to-face three times a year. We meet at the Annual Education Conference in June, and then again in winter and fall.

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