

THE INTERNATIONAL LOCAL PUBLIC AGENCY COMMITTEE



Rita Rasmussen, SR/WA, Chair of the International Local Public Agency Committee, with 2004-2005 IRWA President Gordon E. MacNair, SR/WA, at the 2005 Annual International Education Conference in Toronto, ON.

The success of the International Right of Way Association has always been linked directly to the dedicated professionals who comprise our International Committees. In serving various right of way industries and market segments, their contributions to the Association have played an invaluable role in the growth and advancement of the right of way profession.

As most committee members will attest, participating in IRWA International Committees delivers enormous personal and professional benefits. The most common theme among committee members is the feeling that they've received far more than they've given. From educational opportunities to networking and camaraderie, giving back to one's profession can have an immeasurable impact.

In an interview with Rita Rasmussen, SR/WA, Chair of the International Local Public Agency Committee (ILPAC), we witness the energy and enthusiasm that drives this committee to establish challenging goals in a continuing effort to advance the right of way profession.

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"The ILPAC has so much potential in the areas of education, outreach and communication," notes Rita. "Although we have worked hard in the last few years to re-establish our position within the Association, we still have more work to do. In developing the committee's mission statement moving forward, we have been able to solidify our priorities and goals, however, we must focus our efforts and determine how the committee plans to reach these objectives."

BY BARBARA BILLITZER, PUBLISHER/EDITOR



Committee Members from left to right: Rita Rasmussen, SR/WA; Jeffrey Jones, SR/WA, R/W- NAC, R/W- RAC; Jennifer Walker, SR/WA; Wayne Goss; and Ashleigh Robison, SR/WA, R/W- RAC

How would you describe your committee's overall mission?

RR: The mission of the ILPAC is to provide leadership, educational assistance and promote communication, coordination and cooperation among all who participate in local public agency projects.

What are the major responsibilities of the ILPAC?

RR: The ILPAC provides updated and relevant information regarding policy and procedural changes to IRWA Headquarters. Providing the IRWA members with relevant information and updates on local public agency matters is a core responsibility for all IRWA committees.

One of our primary responsibilities centers on the development of significant programs for IRWA's annual education conferences. This year, we are also actively participating in presenting programs at the Uniform Act Symposium scheduled for November 7-9, 2005, in Anaheim, CA.

Another major goal is working to develop Local Public Agency related "template" programs that can be utilized by all of the IRWA chapters and regions. In fact, earlier this year, we launched a one-day LPA Best Practices Conference in Des Moines, Iowa, which drew over 100 attendees from across the state.

Do you partner with other agencies?

RR: The ILPAC has been actively pursuing relationships with other local public agency associations. We're interested in identifying other associations' major conferences in hopes of developing mutually beneficial partnerships where we can effectively market IRWA membership and the advantages of the ILPAC. As we develop relationships with these LPA related associations, we can share e-mail lists and notify their members of the educational opportunities available through IRWA, such as the annual conference, special symposiums, changes in policies and procedures, etc. We are also

working on a presentation for delivery to these LPA related associations on a chapter/regional/national level. This fall, our committee will be an exhibitor at an American Public Works Association (APWA) event. Partnering with the local chapter, we will host an IRWA booth at the 2005 APWA International Public Works Congress and Exposition, held in Minneapolis, MN.

What is your greatest or most recent accomplishment?

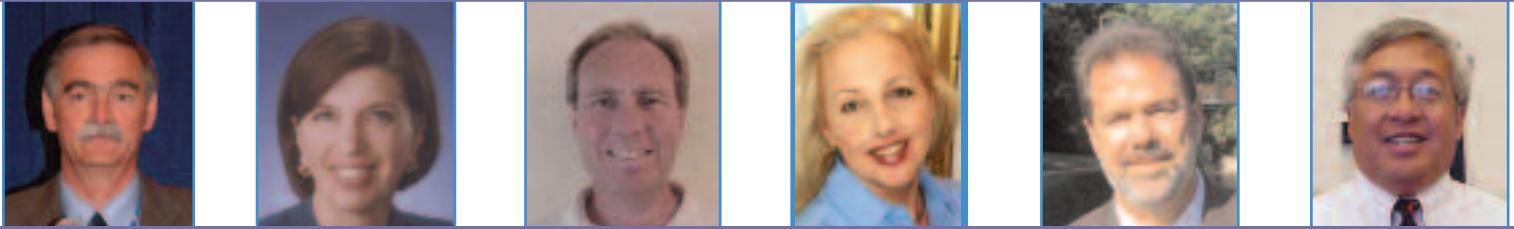
RR: I would have to say that the greatest and most recent accomplishment for the ILPAC has been the successful development of a one-day educational program, Right of Way Best Practices, which was held this past spring in Des Moines, IA. The program was developed by the committee as a "template" to be used by all chapters and regions within the Association. The July/August 2005 issue of Right of Way magazine published an article describing the conference and how the event evolved. If anyone in the Association is interested in launching their own Right of Way Best Practices program, I invite them to contact me for information. We hope that our lessons learned can be applied in other regions to help ensure their success.

What types of educational programs has your committee focused its efforts on?

RR: The ILPAC strives for *quality* over *quantity*.

In the past few years, we've requested that attendees complete evaluation forms at the conclusion of each program. The evaluation forms provide the committee with important feedback regarding the program topic/speaker/room setup, etc., as well as helpful suggestions for programs at future conferences.

These evaluation forms have proven to be a helpful tool for the committee, enabling us to specifically address the education needs of the Association. As a result, our committee programs have drawn strong attendance over the last several years with such topics as Managing Stress in the Workplace, Public Speaking, Turning Assets



From left to right: Sandy Grigg, SR/WA; Leslie Benckendorf, SR/WA; John Giangrant, SR/WA; Jan Rybak-Matalon; Claude Harding, SR/WA; and Lyman Ho, SR/WA

into Cash (co-sponsored with the Asset Management Committee) and the most recent programs, Eminent Domain for Economic Development, Leasing Real Property in IRAQ, Afghanistan & Kyrgystan, and Rails to Trails, just to name a few. The ILPAC is also actively participating in another set of quality programs for the upcoming Uniform Act Symposium.

As the incoming Chair, what is your most immediate priority?

The ILPAC is currently developing a presentation called "What is the LPA?" This presentation will be a great recruitment tool for use at region forums and eventually placed on our committee's web page.

As the committee gains momentum through strong representation in all regions, the need to develop and implement a strategic plan is critical. The level of skill and experience of our members gives us the potential to become one of IRWA's leading committees. Our first step is to determine the committee's primary goals and then build a plan to help us get there. The theme for the ILPAC February 2006 planning meeting is appropriately titled: "The What, Where and How," and will work to focus our efforts.

What are some major obstacles you face?

RR: The most challenging obstacle has been to find active committee representation from each region and at the chapter level. Over the past three years, our committee has experienced vacancies in representation from Regions 4, 6, 8 and 10. In the past few months, we've filled the positions in Regions 4 and 6, and our goal is to have complete representation in all regions by the end of 2005.

It has been said that the LPA professional is a "generalist." I envision the ILPAC as an umbrella committee that branches out to so many different facets of the industry. Understandably, many of the members associated with public agencies are governmental employees, with little or no financial support. Regrettably, this plays an important role with potential candidates in determining whether they can actively participate in the committee. For this reason, I try and encourage the local chapters and regions to help with financial support. Whether it's a \$250 or \$500 contribution, any amount can help us recruit new region representatives in becoming active and

help offset personal expenses associated with being an active member and attending the committee meetings.

What made you decide to join this committee?

RR: After volunteering for all of the officer positions within the chapter level, I began seeking a new challenge within the Association. I decided to focus on becoming an active participant of a committee on a regional level. During this time, I had changed employers, leaving the private sector to take employment within the public sector. At the time, I questioned whether there was an opening available and which committee within Region 3 would be the best match for me.

I remember attending a Region 3 forum where Don Marx, SR/WA, was in attendance. I openly volunteered to serve as a region representative on a committee, if a position were to become available. My offer was met with great enthusiasm! It seemed obvious that the committee best suited to my needs (and most compatible with my current employment) would be none other than the Local Public Agency Committee. I served one year as the Region 3 Representative and became the Vice Chair of the LPA Committee the following year.

Looking back, it might appear that my joining the LPA Committee happened by mere chance. Today, I realize that I could not have made a better choice as to which committee was the best fit. I have Don to thank for pointing me to the starting line.

What have you gained from your participation?

RR: The first thought that comes to mind with my committee involvement is the camaraderie and friendships developed with fellow Association members and the personal/professional growth opportunities. I've been involved with the ILPAC since 2001, and realized early on that the ILPAC had great potential to provide educational opportunities and outreach. Although, my tenure as Chair is still very young, my previous experience with the ILPAC has provided me with the confidence and courage to challenge the ILPAC to new levels as we focus on identifying our purpose within the Association.

How many members do you have?

RR: Currently, the LPA Committee has 16 total members. We're comprised of a Chair, Vice Chair, eight Region Representatives (Vice Chair is also serving as a region representative), six At-Large Members and an IEC Liaison.

How often do you meet?

RR: The LPA Committee typically meets two times annually. Over the last few years, our committee meeting has been scheduled for February. (I, for one, continually campaign to meet in a warmer climate in February.)

The committee gathers prior to the start of the annual conference so we can review the ILPAC scheduled sessions and provide the committee members with a brief outline of the committee's focus for the upcoming year. This past June, our committee met informally for lunch following the conference as well. During that meeting we

discussed feedback received from those who had participated in the ILPAC conference sessions. I hope this becomes a habit which continues for the ILPAC at upcoming conferences.

This year, the ILPAC will take advantage of meeting at the Uniform Relocation Symposium to be held in November in Anaheim, CA, as it appears we will have several committee members attending. While the committee communicates regularly through e-mails, we want to seize every opportunity to gather together and meet as often as possible.

How would someone interested get involved in this committee?

RR: The ILPAC covers so many facets of the industry. Anyone who is involved or familiar with an agency and its issues is encouraged to get involved with the Local Public Agency Committee by contacting me at ritar@cedar-rapids.org or by contacting Jeff Jones at jjones@rcoc.org.

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