

THE PURPOSE OF THE
 YOUNG LEADERSHIP COUNCIL
 IS TO FOSTER NEW IDEAS AND
 TO ENCOURAGE IMPLEMENTATION
 OF SPECIFIC STEPS AND
 MEASURES TO ENSURE CONTINUED
 GROWTH, RECOGNITION AND
 RESPECT FOR THE INTERNATIONAL
 RIGHT OF WAY ASSOCIATION.

YOUNG LEADERSHIP COUNCIL

EAGER TO WORK FOR CHANGE



Change can be good. Change is inevitable. People resist change.

These three truisms were on the minds of each of the participants who gathered at the first annual International Right of Way Association's Young Leadership Council Conference in Reno, Nevada, October 16-18, 1998. The Young Leadership Council (YLC) was formed out of a commitment to develop new IRWA leaders, with two purposes in mind. The first is to foster creative thought for younger, talented individuals involved in the right of way profession. The second is to serve as a source of leadership for local chapters, regions and international committees.

By MICHAEL W. WELCH, YLC CHAIR

CHANGE CAN BE GOOD. CHANGE IS INEVITABLE. PEOPLE RESIST CHANGE.

Approximately 33 of IRWA's 75 local chapters were represented at this inaugural meeting. On Friday night, attendees were treated to a welcome reception sponsored by Allen, Williford and Seale, Inc. and Contract Land Staff, Inc. During this informal gathering, a feeling of guarded optimism was prevalent. Conversations centered on the numerous positive attributes of IRWA and the ways in which the YLC could contribute ideas that would preserve and advance the Association. Young Leadership Council members represent some of the brightest, most articulate and most opinionated members from their respective regions. In that sense, Friday night's reception resembled the calm before the storm, as each attendee was well aware that the real work would start on Saturday morning.

The format for Saturday's Young Leadership Council meeting was simple. After a brief welcome and introductions,

the council divided into five discussion groups, each charged with the task of identifying the current state of IRWA, primary deficiencies in the association, and a plan of attack for implementing change. After selecting a discussion leader and a secretary, each of the groups engaged in round table discussions to identify problem areas. The advantage of the Young Leadership Council discussion group format is that it provided five independent views of current IRWA issues. Each group had representatives from different geographic regions as well as from the various disciplines included within IRWA. This diversity ensured that each problem, and consequently each potential solution, considered all aspects of our membership. When the morning sessions had ended, the discussion groups had identified the following areas of concern:

- Membership in the International

Right of Way Association is dwindling. According to statistics provided to the Young Leadership Council, membership within IRWA has decreased over the past 10-year period. Ironically, information was available that indicated that new membership was strong in some areas but that a lack of member retention resulted in the overall deficit.

- There is a perceived lack of recognition of IRWA as a professional association. The discussion groups generally agreed that we, as an association, have failed to educate allied and related professions, as well as the general public, as to what IRWA is, what we do and what services we provide.

- There is a perceived lack of recognition and respect of the SR/WA as a professional designation. The SR/WA designation is intended to recognize individuals who "have achieved professional status through experience, educa-



tion and examination". It was the opinion of the Young Leadership Council that the merits of the SR/WA designation have not been adequately marketed and that the IRWA Certification Program further diluted the SR/WA designation.

- The association has not capitalized on technological opportunities currently available to enhance our education programs. The council recognizes that educational opportunities provided by the association are one of the strongest and most respected aspects of IRWA. We have an unparalleled ability to educate within our represented disciplines. However, with today's rapidly advancing information technologies, the Young Leadership Council believes that current educational programs are not fully utilizing available resources.

- IRWA currently has no marketing plan, marketing committee or marketing budget. Strong concern was echoed by each discussion group pertaining to the lack of marketing within the association. It was the general consensus that steps must be taken in order to promote the association not only at the local level, but also at the regional and international levels as well.

As shown above, the Young Leadership Council identified several areas of major concern, which speak directly to the current and future state of our association. However, the purpose of the Young Leadership Council was not simply to identify areas needing attention. After identifying problems, the afternoon sessions were dedicated to creating solutions.

As you can imagine, round table discussions can become quite animated when strong-willed individuals are faced with the task of solving complicated problems. Attempting to maintain a stance of revenue neutrality exacerbated the complexity of identifying solutions to the aforementioned problems. While change may be inevitable, it is certainly more accepted if it can be accomplished without the expenditure of additional funds. With that in mind, afternoon sessions soon became nighttime sessions as each of the discussion groups ham-

pered out wish lists and action plans. Saturday night's work session concluded with each group designating a speaker to present their findings to the council on Sunday morning.

(It was at approximately 11:30 pm on Saturday night when I realized that selection as a presenter, while a great honor, greatly reduced one's ability to enjoy some of Reno, Nevada's abundant entertainment alternatives.)

Sunday morning's presentations were reflective of the previous day's work. Each group provided focused, optimistic and insightful solutions to the identified problems. In some instances, three, four or even five of the discussion groups proposed similar plans. This unity of thought, when coming from independent entities, validated many of the plans for change. The following points detail specific measures or initiatives proposed by the Young Leadership Council:

- In order to address the dwindling membership and lack of member retention, several membership alternatives were proposed. The Young Leadership Council suggests a reduced cost membership for first time only members. This membership would be offered at the associations "break even" cost. That is, whatever money is necessary to cover magazine publications, mailouts, etc. would be the only cost paid by the first time member. This proposal is revenue neutral to implement and additional monies may be earned through membership retention.

- The Young Leadership Council urges IRWA to adopt a mentoring program whereby each new member has one-to-one contact with an existing member. A current member may sponsor a new member, or in the case of an unsolicited membership, the membership chair at the local level can appoint a mentor. Active members would volunteer to be mentors and it would be their responsibility to explain what the International Right of Way Association is and what it has to offer potential members. The mentor would provide a membership package, accompany the

new member to a chapter function and most importantly, follow-up throughout the year to ensure membership retention. As with the previous proposal, the mentoring program is revenue neutral and can be expected to generate additional sources of income with membership retention.

- The Young Leadership Council proposes that IRWA actively pursue the establishment of interactive self-study courses which may be taught either through CD ROM or possibly from our web site. The Council recognizes the importance of education to the framework of IRWA and we urge that steps be taken quickly so that we may continue to control industry specific courses. Also, the council believes that additional revenue, as well as respect and recognition for our association, could be obtained by conducting educational courses with allied associations and related industries.

- The Young Leadership Council proposes abandonment of the IRWA Certification Program. While we recognize that certain disciplines within the association have no other designating body, it appears that the Certification Program is under-utilized and somewhat redundant to the SR/WA designation program. In an effort to further bolster recognition for the SR/WA designation, it was the Young Leadership Council's position that every effort should be made to focus recognition on those individuals who have obtained the highest designation that we offer. Again, this proposal is revenue neutral and could potentially be revenue positive when considering the decreased cost by eliminating necessary printed materials for the certification program.

- The Young Leadership Council strongly urges that IRWA immediately form a marketing committee who will be charged with the formulation and implementation of a marketing plan. Additionally, it is our belief that monies must be made available in order to promote the association. The lack of a marketing plan, marketing budget and marketing committee was considered to be one of our association's greatest deficiencies. Membership on the marketing

committee can be on a volunteer basis, which would be revenue neutral. However, monies will be necessary in the actual implementation of marketing strategies. It is our opinion that funding of a marketing plan is essential in order to stop the erosion of our membership base.

Identifying areas of concern within IRWA or any other organization is not difficult. However, agreeing on specific measures to correct these problems is extremely difficult. Further, the most difficult task in effecting organizational change is implementation of the programs and follow-through. All of us present at the first meeting of the Young Leadership Council felt privileged to have had the opportunity to work toward solutions to ensure success for IRWA. People resist change. To resist change now, IRWA would be neglecting indicators that demand action be taken.

As chairman of the Young Leadership Council, I urge each chapter to consider sending representation to our next meeting in Albuquerque, New Mexico at the Annual International Education Seminar June 20, 1999. There is much work to be done and the more people we have backing our proposals the greater our chances to enact positive change.

The Young Leadership Council has adopted the following mission statement.

The purpose of the Young Leadership Council is to foster new ideas and to encourage implementation of specific steps and measures to ensure continued growth, recognition and respect for the International Right of Way Association.

The mission statement of the YLC is clear and is born out of a commitment to the association by individuals dedicated to preserving and enhancing IRWA.

Personally, I wish to thank each participant in the first meeting of the Young Leadership Council. I consider it a privilege to serve as your chairman and will continue to press forward with our concerns and proposals. I would also like to acknowledge Brian Watts, YLC Vice Chair, and council members Mark Keller, Karen Ammar and Melissa

Mallot for their commitment of time and energy for the upcoming year. I look forward to seeing each of you at our next meeting in Albuquerque, New Mexico as well as a few new faces from those chapters who weren't able to join us in Reno, Nevada.

People resist change. Change is inevitable. For IRWA, change will be good. ■



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