



The Unknown

HERO

Sharing mutual admiration and respect

BY RONN CARLENTINE, SR/WA

Some folks tend to downplay the impact they have on others, but it is the unknown hero that deserves recognition. Yet, this is the kind of person who doesn't seek it nor expect it. For that reason, it seems worthy to pay honor to an individual whose name will never appear in the books of history. He is someone who never won a sweepstakes or lottery. What he did win was a career in the right of way profession—working for a public agency where he was challenged with solving all the problems that crossed his path.

I chose this unknown member because I know his story particularly well. He was 20 years old when he began in the right of way profession. He was grandfathered into a professional organization known as the American Right of Way Association. He had little money but exhibited the confidence

of a lion. He would work long days and nights on his journey to the top. The pot of gold at the end of his rainbow was the personal satisfaction of a job well done and the opportunity to give a pat on the back to those who were responsible for successfully completing the project.

This right of way agent was not afraid of hard work. As the years went on, he heard about a job with a larger public agency. It appealed to his nature, as the pursuits of career and challenge were traits of his. With his dedication to the profession, it was no wonder that other people admired his abilities and followed in his footsteps.

While I had not planned to identify this person, I can tell you that he gave me my first right of way job. And he inspired and

motivated me to become an active member of the Association. He was quite the mentor. A rugged individualist, he was the kind of man that blazed the trail. And this was a trail that many followed because of his strong commitment to family, work and the Association.

Sure, he had the bulldog in him—someone who would not be deterred by walking through a snowstorm. On the other hand, he had the sensitivity of a teddy bear. When after-work hours came, the office staff descended upon him. They enjoyed his company and jumped at the opportunity to stop by his house for some food and drink, thanks to the hospitality of his wonderful wife.

With his talents, intellect and understanding of all aspects of the right of way profession, there were numerous business opportunities to induce him back to work after retirement. But because it was fashionable to retire when one could, he and his wife sold their house and went to live on the coastal bluff of retirement-ville. His office staff and local chapter recognized the contributions he made to the right of way profession and presented him with many plaques and awards for his service. He would go on to live a long life because he was part of a hearty breed. He was in a hospital bed just once, and he told the doctor to make the best of it because he wasn't coming back again in his lifetime. Even in retirement, he continued to get up at 5:30 am in the morning. He had done it all his life, and no one could stop him.

Knowing this unknown hero has enhanced my life, and I will be forever grateful. 🍀



Ronn works for the Office of Real Estate Services for the City of Colorado Springs in Colorado. He has served in a variety of leadership roles, including Chair of the International Public Agency Committee and International Ethics Committee.

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March 7, 1994

Dear Ronn,

I just finished reading your recent article on the unknown hero. There is a part of the story you didn't tell, however. It's about the Lion who was always searching for that particular young man who wasn't too proud to give a days work for a days pay. Who, even while involved in the most menial tasks, had a smile for others and took great pride in the quality of the work he was doing. A young man that was filled with expectation and the desire to work his way up to bigger and better things that the life of a career professional could provide. Let's call this young man a "Lion Cub."

Today, the successful Cub probably doesn't remember the early days of confusion, bewilderment, fear of failure, and the moments of depression as he struggled to acquire the basic knowledge that would carry him on to a successful career as a right of way professional. The Lion remembers well those times that the Cub stood at the crossroads and wondered if his goal was worth the sacrifice or if he should cast his lot with a faster "quick buck" crowd and live high for the moment and to hell with tomorrow. But this Cub had the strength and vision to choose the right road in the face of much adversity.

Now, as the Cub reflects on years gone by and realizes that he is now in reach of his goal, he thinks the Lion was the one who made it all possible. The truth of the matter is that it was the right kind of Cub that made it all come together. While we may give some small degree of credit to the Lion for selecting the proper Cub, it was the Cub that hung in there when the going got tough. It was the Cub that burned the midnight oil when the project demanded it. It was the Cub that hit the books in his leisure hours. It was the Cub that was there when the Lion most needed someone.

It is my firm belief that if our profession is to survive with a reputation for employing ethical, well educated, knowledgeable professionals, the Lions of our profession must always be alert and on the lookout for those rare Cubs that stand head and shoulders above the run of the mill. Now that you have joined the ranks of the Lions, look for a promising Cub. When you find one that you have that gut feeling about, try to offer a helping hand and guide that Cub in the right direction. Then, you too may experience the rewards of that Cub's success. I can assure you that it is a very fulfilling and rewarding experience for the Lion.

Sincerely,

The LION, SR/WA