



# Leaving our Mark

Never stop moving ahead

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**Like most people, before I knew about right of way, I always took infrastructure for granted. Every day, I saw and used roads, power lines, pipelines, railroads, airstrips, canals and anything else you can think of, without ever considering the work that went into the creation of these assets. But 30 years ago, that changed abruptly, when I began my right of way career as a fresh-faced acquisition and relocation agent on the Interstate 49 project in north Louisiana.**

After a few years learning my way around the profession with the Louisiana Department of Transportation, the I-49 project had run its course. I applied for a Chief Real Estate Specialist position with the City of Shreveport, and soon after getting the position I received an invitation from my local IRWA Chapter about an upcoming meeting. I'd never heard of the Association, but realized that getting involved and being able to "talk shop" with peers was a pretty interesting proposition, since by then I'd discovered that right of way acquisition was not the hottest conversation topic at most parties. Over the next few years, I had the opportunity to visit with, befriend, and be mentored by some of the most seasoned right of way folks in my area. Needless to say, after experiencing what IRWA had to offer, I have been a student of the specialized knowledge surrounding the right of way business ever since.

As a local public agency employee, involvement at the Chapter or Region level was as far as I'd ever envisioned myself advancing in the Association. It was challenging at first to convince my employer that participating in IRWA was a worthwhile investment. But over time, I brought back enough new and useable information from my Region involvement that they were able to see the value and continue to fund my participation.

My turning point came in 2000, when I was offered the opportunity to attend IRWA's Annual Conference in Orlando, Florida. This was my introduction to the international volunteer opportunities available, and I was hooked. I joined the International Local Public Agency Committee, moving up the ranks to become the Committee Chair. Soon after, I became involved in serving at the Region level, starting as Secretary and eventually becoming the Region 2 Chair. Once my term ended, I wanted to pay the organization back for the advantages it had given me, so I ran and was elected to the International Executive Committee in 2011.

Throughout my career, I was fortunate to work under some visionary leaders who recognized the potential of an Association that could share members' best practices. They also understood that providing a platform for peers to connect in such a specialized industry improved our odds of project success.

As we enter this new year of leadership, it's exciting to see the growth that the organization has undergone in the seemingly brief time I have been a part of the IEC. We have been working to advance the profession by increasing the relevance of our educational offerings and credentials, collaborating with our Young Professionals group to prepare the next generation of right of way leaders, signing partnership agreements with North American federal agencies, and working with numerous foreign governments, organizations and research groups to enhance the role we play in the industry.

We have refocused our internal organizational structure while advancing our education strategies. And we have garnered global participation and are attracting younger membership segment. With that being said, where do we go in the coming year? Forward! When we stop moving ahead, we become irrelevant. Our direction for the near future is established, yet we must continue to build on the recognition that IRWA represents the best our profession has to offer. Our success can be limited only by complacency. Let's leave our mark by establishing this as a year of advancements in every facet.

I want to thank the members of IRWA for allowing me the opportunity to serve as your next International President. It is both a privilege and an honor to lead a group of professionals dedicated to building a better world... together. 🌟