



Magically Multiplied

Getting back more than you can imagine

LEE HAMRE, SR/WA, R/W-URAC, R/W-RAC



Like most of us, I did not grow up dreaming of the day I would become a right of way agent. I spent my childhood dreaming of the places my career as a chart topping recording artist would take me, and though I never did break into “The Big Time,” I did parlay that dream into many wonderful (albeit very low paying) experiences as a working Nashville musician.

I got into the right of way business to make ends meet, but the day came to trade in that dream and accept Helen Peck’s invitation to work with her at the Denver based right of way company she founded in 1988 – H.C. Peck & Associates. Helen was not only an amazing woman and a much respected talent in the ROW business; she was also my mother, so how could I refuse?

My right of way “ah-ha” moment came when I took my first relocation course from FHWA real estate guru Ron Fannin, my mentor and true Uniform Relocation Act hero. During those two days of stumbling through the regulatory morass of 49 CFR Part 24, a Uniform Act zealot (me) was born.

While working in Denver under my mother’s influence, I soon began to share her enormous enthusiasm and respect for IRWA, especially at the Chapter level. I got involved with IRWA’s Mile High Chapter 6, and I am forever grateful to our incredibly wise and generous chapter members for their ongoing support and encouragement.

My mother stressed education and participation as being equally crucial to professional development, and with her support I began earning my R/W-RAC and SR/WA credentials. The Chapter Newsletter Editor position followed, and before I knew it, I was working my way through the Chapter Leadership Chairs.

In 2000, my mother’s best friend (and Chapter 6 “Chicks in Right of Way” member) Frances Reisbeck retired from Colorado DOT and recommended me to fill her position as Region 9 Representative to the International Relocation Assistance Committee. If you look up “perfect fit” in the dictionary, you would see a picture of me walking into my first IRAC meeting at the Annual Conference in Orlando. I can only say that working closely with that group of dedicated professionals has made me a better person - both personally and professionally - than I could have ever hoped to become without their influence. The same can be said about my work with the International Governing Council, IRWA staff, and each of the International Executive Committee officers.

Through my involvement with the IRWA over the past 22 years, I have been given gifts I could never have conceived of back in Nashville. I now have a family of colleagues (many of whom are competitors) who happily lay aside their personal interests to work together toward our Association’s common goals.

When my mother died suddenly in 2003, my involvement with IRWA gave me the reputation, skills and fortitude that made it possible for me, along with our amazing Peck Team, to lead the company out of those troubled waters and on to greater success. I even met the man of my dreams through a blind date on an IRWA Chapter outing to the Rocky Mountain Arsenal - a wildlife refuge and former munitions dump. How romantic! And 10 years later, the husband and I are still going strong.

But perhaps most importantly, IRWA has helped me to understand that when I traded in my old dream for this new one, I actually traded up. The life IRWA has given me has proven to be the more rewarding one. All of us involved in IRWA really are building a better world, together. And every day I get to be an integral part of this amazing organization helping others shine, rather than just trying to light up a radio dial all by myself.

In every instance, whatever time, money, passion and enthusiasm I have put into IRWA has come back to me, not only in kind, but magically multiplied. I encourage everyone to get involved—passionately and enthusiastically involved—with an IRWA Chapter, Region, Committee or Community of Practice, and watch as that magic begins to happen for you. I am honored to serve as your 2014-2015 President. Thank you for the extraordinary opportunity. 🍀