



San Diego Chapter Goes Collegiate



BY ZACHARY SVELLING

Earlier this year, IRWA's San Diego Chapter 11 reached an educational milestone in terms of college outreach. In March, the Real Estate Society hosted an IRWA panel of right of way speakers on campus at San Diego State University (SDSU). The event was attended by 35 undergraduates and graduate students with one thing in common – an educational emphasis in real estate.

HOW IT ALL BEGAN

After a year working in right of way, I attended an IRWA course taught by Carol Brooks, SR/WA. I was really surprised by how much I still had to learn! After the class, I spoke with Carol and incoming Chapter President, Joe Currie. Before long, I was asking how I might get involved with the local chapter. I mentioned my alumni role with the San Diego State University Real Estate Society, a student-run organization dedicated to preparing college students for their careers. Needless to say, college outreach quickly became the focus of our conversation.

Over the past year, I had come to realize that eminent domain and right of way was hardly covered at all in the SDSU real estate course content. Instead, classes focused on the more commonly traversed areas like finance, residential and commercial brokerage, land-use theory and property law. For example, there was virtually no discussion of why an acquisition consultant might hire a surveyor to map and write a legal description for a part acquisition. Nor did we learn why said consultant might need a condemnation appraiser because the property owners didn't want a high-voltage transmission line in their common area. It was evident that this kind of insight could only be

attained from either first-hand experience or by attending an IRWA class.

Living and breathing right of way as a career, I now had first-hand knowledge to share with my alumni organization about this little mentioned area of real estate. Better yet, I could directly expose them to an association whose members are actually hiring! There was clearly an ongoing opportunity for IRWA chapters to educate local college students on our niche in the real estate world. Chapter members could also benefit from recruiting these bright goal-oriented graduates eager to start their careers.

TRANSFORMING INTENTION INTO REALITY

Within a few months, Carol and I established the concept - a professional panel of speakers who would address the student organization. The panel would be comprised of various professionals from the local chapter who would explain how their specialty fits into the right of way puzzle. Each speaker would also highlight their educational background and how they got started in their right of way career.

I reached out to my alumni organization to gauge their interest. After a brief meeting with the association's president, the Board of Directors at the Real Estate Society of SDSU confirmed the organization's desire to host the panel. Carol worked her magic and organized a panel of five industry practitioners to each give a presentation. The panel included a licensed and certified federal land surveyor, an independent right of way consultant, an environmental analyst, a county water authority expert and a utilities acquisition agent.



Presenters shared how they got started in right of way and the diverse career opportunities available. The panel of experts included, from left, Bernard Johnson, SR/WA, Mike Hart, PLS, CFEdS, Lucy Galvin, SR/WA, MAI, Nick Von Gymnich, SR/WA and Carol Brooks, SR/WA.

THE MAIN EVENT

The meeting kicked off with Mike Hart of Towill Surveying, Mapping and GIS Services, who gave a general presentation on right of way and how surveying fits in to the picture. He told stories of surveying logging terrain boundaries while working for the forest industry, which helped illustrate why a career in surveying requires special certification and licenses. He outlined some of the high-tech ways that surveys are conducted with GPS, LiDAR and aerial photography, and how his timber industry experience prepared him for surveying boundaries of a corridor project located within a right of way.

A licensed real estate broker with 28 years of industry experience, Bernard Johnson, SR/WA, GRI and President and CEO of The Bernard Johnson Group, Inc. explained how his background was applicable in transportation, commercial and industrial transactions. Highlighting the benefits of being a minority business owner, he expressed great pride in being able to leverage his small company to react quickly to changing business and project requirements. He also touched on the salaries available to those who work as consultants for private right of way companies.

Lucy Galvin, SR/WA, MAI, an environmental analyst for Helix Water District, outlined the diversity in her job and described what's involved with managing environmental regulations compliance. Showing a range of properties owned by the water district, she reinforced the importance of protecting the environment, a topic of great importance to land professionals and those who work in environmental mitigation. Promoting the benefits of being a member of IRWA, she encouraged students to consider careers in the public sector because of its market stability.

A graduate of Boston College, Nick Von Gymnich, SR/WA, works for the San Diego County Water Authority and discussed what's involved with working for a public agency. He outlined the responsibilities associated with property acquisition, planning, asset management, hosting public meetings, as well as managing project budgets and schedules. Nick also promoted the value of attending IRWA's educational courses and conferences, noting that he will serve as the Conference Chair for the 2015 IRWA Annual International Conference, hosted by the San Diego Chapter.

The final presenter was well-known speaker, trainer and author Carol L. Brooks, SR/WA, the owner of Cornerstone Management Skills. As an expert in utilities acquisition, she illustrated the career opportunities and types of employers that hire right of way utility acquisition agents, such as gas and electric, cable, wireless, water companies and public agencies. She also described the attributes most often sought in the workplace. In a nutshell, employers seek people-oriented agents who are self-motivated, collaborative and have strong communication and interpersonal skills.

Each presentation highlighted the education and networking benefits associated with IRWA membership. At the conclusion of the program, speakers answered questions, distributed IRWA literature and copies Right of Way magazine, as well as brochures from their respective employers.

LOOKING FORWARD

When targeting the college demographic, it's important to highlight how a student can transition from the classroom to the career world, a topic that is sometimes overlooked in college curriculums. Becoming a member of an association that is both educational and networking-oriented early in college can better prepare students for employment once they graduate. The Real Estate Society of SDSU has always prided itself on preparing its members for the journey from classroom to career. With such positive response from the participating students, I would encourage more chapters to conduct outreach programs with local colleges and universities.

For tips on starting a college outreach program, see the article by James P. Anthony, SR/WA, titled Start a College Outreach Program, published in the January/February 2011 issue of Right of Way magazine.



Zachary Svelling

Zachary Svelling is an Associate Right of Way Agent for the California Department of Transportation. He is a graduate of San Diego State University, alumni Career Development Chairperson for the Real Estate Society, and a member of IRWA.