

ENGAGING our Future Leaders

The next generation of right of way professionals

BY BRODIE ALLEN, SR/WA



With the aging demographics in the workforce, a leadership gap is forming in labor markets as baby boomers continue to retire. This trend applies across all types of organizations, and IRWA's membership is no exception.

In order for us to ensure the Association's future growth and success, we must attract energetic young minds and find new ways to engage them. Not only do we need youthful minds who are engaged and interested, we need to prepare these future leaders with a strong mentorship and development plan to ensure successful leadership succession in IRWA.

Seeking out the next generation of leaders is not a new concept for IRWA. Over the years, IRWA has formed several groups in hopes of identifying and attracting younger members interested in getting involved. One of the first groups was called the IRWA Young Leaders. You might be interested to know that members of that group included Faith Roland, SR/WA and Jim Struble, SR/WA, both of whom went on to become IRWA International Presidents. More recently, we have watched as pockets of young professional groups are forming and thriving at the Chapter and Region level, a trend we hope will continue.

A Plan to Recharge

As Lisa Harrison, SR/WA was preparing to assume her role as International President in 2013, she asked me if I would be willing to quarterback an initiative to potentially reenergize IRWA's Young Professionals

(YP) Group and elevate it to the International level. At the time, I was serving as a Region Chair and as a member of the International Governing Council. Lisa felt there was a significant benefit in my serving a dual role as an active Young Professional. And so it began.

The YP Group is specifically designed for right of way professionals who want to become more actively involved in the Association while enhancing their skills. In 2013, we began targeting members who were interested in building their industry network, sharing knowledge and growing their careers.

Our purpose in year one was to conduct an evaluation of needs, provide recommendations to the IGC and present a symposium in conjunction with the 2013 Annual Conference in Hartford, CT. We experienced some minor hiccups in the inaugural rollout and didn't meet our attendance goals. We did however get some very positive feedback from those who did attend, and we also reached some other major goals with the IGC. This gave us the momentum we needed to put other key objectives in motion that we hope to complete in year two. The YP Group is midway through a two-year plan, and its success to date has been highly rewarding.



With nearly 15 years experience in right of way, Brodie is the Founder of Evolve Surface Strategies, Inc., a company he started in 2007.

Encouraging Independence

I believe that the most successful groups are a result of likeminded individuals coming together to share common interests and ideas. For that reason, we



Presenting at the YP Symposium, past International President Faith Roland, SR/WA (right) shared insight about progressing through the chapter, region and international leadership roles.

have come to recognize the importance of encouraging the independent groups that are forming naturally within each region.

We have learned that the young professionals in one region may have completely different needs and challenges than those in another. For example, the needs of Chapter 8 in Texas are much different than those of Chapter 48 in Calgary. Chapter 8 has a thriving YP membership that gathers independently from its general membership body. In Chapter 48, the senior members have transitioned into informal mentorship roles, and the YP's have been encouraged to take on the formal executive roles. Since the YP's are serving as Chapter leaders, forming a separate YP committee like Chapter 8 would be redundant, as they are in essence, the same individuals. And even though each chapter operates with a different approach to engaging YPs, the good news is that both these chapters have active participation from young professionals who are genuinely interested in IRWA and growing the Association. Success!

In response, IRWA is considering using a hybrid Community of Practice model, where the groups can grow and evolve organically within the Regions, and have those respective groups potentially receive International support in the long term.

Passing the Reins

We have all heard the Association describe its leadership structure as a parade of volunteers, and the YP Group faces that same opportunity! As leaders move up the ladder and on to new challenges, it's essential that we continue to attract newcomers who are inspired to serve in an environment where fresh ideas and innovative thinking are encouraged.

While I will continue to quarterback the team for the next six months behind the scenes, there are some extremely bright, eager and talented YPs that have joined our hardworking team. With the noteworthy efforts of members like Region 3's Aimie Mims, RWP, Region 2's Tayler Sass, Region 1's Janella Cordova and Region 10's Zack Darragh, the YPs have come a long way in growing awareness at the local level and have been instrumental in ensuring success across the Association as a whole. This influx of new energy and innovation will build on the group's existing foundation and take the YP concept to the next level.

Growing the Movement

Moving forward, our primary goal is to bridge the communications between the regional groups and facilitate knowledge sharing and best practices so that we can encourage other YP groups to form in every region

across the globe. We've recently reached out to all the Region Chairs in a recruitment effort with an objective having at least one YP representative from each region on the various subcommittees we plan to form. Ensuring the success of the YP Groups will become even more important as the Association welcomes new members from our chapters in Mexico, South Africa and Nigeria.

I believe it's vital for the YP movement to grow within the various regions first and then come together at the Annual YP Symposium held in conjunction with the IRWA Annual Conference. I am confident that more groups will form as the word gets out, and we hope to double the turnout we had at the 2014 symposium in Hartford, CT. I encourage all YPs to mark your calendars, start pestering your boss, and get your butts to San Diego for the June 2015 event. Keep an eye out for more announcements on the MemberNetwork and LinkedIn. ☘



Organizers of the 2014 Young Professionals Symposium, from left, Tyler Jans, SR/WA, Courtney Otto, Aaron Adkins, SR/WA, R/W-NAC, R/W-RAC, R/W-URAC, Brent Farner and Brodie Allen, SR/WA.

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