



An Interview with IRWA
International President

Lee Hamre, SR/WA, R/W-URAC, R/W-RAC

Lee met Austin, her husband of ten years, at a Chapter outing to the Rocky Mountain Arsenal, a wildlife refuge and former munitions dump.



In a recent speech, I heard Lee describe her favorite cartoon. It's about six people in a rowboat. Three are rowing in one direction and three in the other. Needless to say, they aren't getting anywhere. And with their heads down, no one seems to notice. Summarizing the main point, Lee says there is nothing quite as vital to success as keeping everyone rowing in the same direction, toward the same goals.

If anyone can inspire a collaborative team effort, it's Lee. A role model for consensus building, she uses a cooperative approach in building partnerships, and she instills a sense of fellowship wherever she goes. As she assumes the role of International President, we spoke with Lee about vision and goals for the coming year.

You have volunteered much of your time to IRWA. What has been your most rewarding experience?

Wow, there have been so many of them. It is no secret that I have really valued my time as a member of the International Relocation Assistance Committee (now a Community of Practice), and the opportunities I have had through that group to learn, to grow professionally and to help others do the same. Since the jobs we do as real estate professionals have a direct impact on people's lives—people that need our help every day in an immediate way—it is very rewarding to step back and see the continued drive for excellence and self improvement that IRWA consistently instills and supports in its members, because that drive results in our increased ability to help the people who depend on us.

How would you describe the benefits of giving back to one's profession?

Just being in a position where doing what I love can be seen as "giving back to my profession" is a real blessing. I routinely find myself almost giddily enthusiastic about the work I do not only as a real estate professional but as a volunteer. I am also completely energized by the countless

opportunities our Association has to change the world for the better. These experiences continue to solidify my belief that the feeling of completeness we all intuitively search for in "getting" is much more readily accessible as the result of "giving." That's just one more great reason to get (and to stay) involved in IRWA.

What would you say is the greatest benefit of being a member?

The people. Hands down. As a member of IRWA, I have access to over 10,000 professionals around the world, each possessing a wealth of ideas, experiences and fellowship to share, and most of them are as excited as I am to do just that. Whether I need to find out where I can put my hands on FHWA's guidance on the implementation of the MAP-21 URA statutory changes or even how make a wild rice hot dish on a stick, someone out there—someone I have access to simply through my IRWA membership—has the answer I need. From Alaska to South Africa, from Minnesota to Mexico, we are an amazing group. And we are also an invaluable resource for one another.

As part of the International Executive Committee, what has been your biggest challenge to date?

Having to learn that as I move forward in my leadership responsibilities, it is absolutely crucial for me to keep an eye on the big picture. And in order to do that, I must constantly remind myself to widen my field of vision – just like widening a telephoto camera lens – to take in every aspect of the Association at once without favoring any separate perspectives. In my experiences as a Chapter President, as a Region Representative to an International Committee, and even as a Region Chair, I used to look at every decision and action with a razor-sharp focus on how it would affect me, my immediate "constituents" and the relatively narrow field of interests I was advocating for in that position. While this can be a valuable approach at the Chapter

level, as a member of the International Governing Council, I began to see the wisdom of expanding my thinking to consider the impact of our decisions not just on my Region, but on the Association as a whole. And now, in my final year as an IEC member, that "vision thing" comes much more naturally to me, as does the realization that continuing to maximize each individual's member value is my highest priority as President of the Association.

What role has education played in your career?

I consider the time, money and effort I spent earning and maintaining my IRWA credentials, namely my SR/WA, my R/W-RAC and R/W-URAC, as being the most valuable use of those commodities I can imagine. Having attained the level of expertise and experience these designations and certifications represent has absolutely differentiated me in the marketplace, in my industry and among my peers. As a certified instructor for all of IRWA's Relocation Assistance Courses, I find it every bit as rewarding and exciting to be on the delivery side of our educational program as on the receiving end. There is nothing quite like presenting an idea and watching as a student grabs it, tests it and then runs with it as far as they can go. Passion and enthusiasm beget more passion and enthusiasm, and because of the dedicated members of IRWA's International Professional Development Committee, everywhere we look, we see that happening.



Mile High Chapter 6 members celebrate Lee's inauguration. Back row from left, Jeff Hanna, Charles Nelson, MAI, Jim Struble, SR/WA, Austin Hamre, Lyman Ho, Fred Easton, Jr., PLS, Doug Nitzkowski, MAI, SR/WA, Tony Pollack, SR/WA, and Alan Morganfield, SR/WA. Front row from left: Mike Anders, SR/WA, Richard Pittenridge, SR/WA, Kathy Rotello, Lee Hamre, SR/WA, Bonnie Roerig, MAI, Joanie Cravens, Barbara Anders, R/W-NAC, R/W-RAC, Magaly Fernandez, R/W-RAC, and J E Parker, SR/WA.

As President, what are some of your most immediate priorities?

A top one is continuing to implement the changes we've made around industry relevance, especially with regard to our industry-specific career paths toward earning the SR/WA designation. Establishing a strategic vision and standardized guidelines for our Discipline Communities of Practice (CoPs) is another key priority, especially if we hope to advance our goal of being a more engaged and inclusive organization. To ensure we are effectively serving the needs of our chapters, affiliates and other partners domestically and globally, we will consistently identify emerging needs as they arise, and gauge our ability to meet those needs. We also need to simplify some of our internal processes to expand our capacities.

What do you hope to accomplish during your 12-month term?

There are a number of important projects already underway that I look forward to shepherding through my term. One especially close to my heart is our current effort to refresh and update parts of our existing curriculum. We have recently employed a new approach that has enabled us to complete the first round of revisions that will soon be available to our membership. Continuing to develop new education products and simplifying our designation pathway is also a major focus, because by making our credentials more accessible to members, we add member value. Other areas that I expect to advance this year include the expansion of the IRWA University to deliver greater access to our existing body of knowledge, new

Chapter and affiliate growth beyond U.S. and Canadian borders and increasing IRWA's relevance as a global player in the real estate infrastructure industry.

IRWA membership has been expanding on a global basis. How does this benefit the Association and its current members?

First, there is a great deal we can learn from each other. Along with industry relevance, our global members drive value by adding to our overall body of knowledge and experience, as many have witnessed by attending our international education sessions at IRWA's Annual Conference and reading about their projects in Right of Way Magazine. It's also important to note that our new members from outside North America are joining IRWA with the specific goal of earning IRWA credentials. That means our credentials are perceived as the international standard. As more

right of way professionals attain these credentials, they will serve as an important differentiator for hiring around the globe.

What role will chapters play as we expand globally?

Chapters are—and will continue to be—the lifeblood of the Association. Our founders recognized the value of meeting face-to-face when Chapter 1 was first launched in 1934 in Los Angeles, California. At the time, there was a dire need for ethical guidelines and professional practices to inspire confidence in right of way professionals.

With members now residing all over the world, infrastructure real estate may be far more complicated than in the past, yet the need for core ethical guidelines and professional practices is still very much in demand. As we expand globally, new chapters will create a venue for right of way



During an awards ceremony, Lee shares the spotlight with 2013-2014 International President Lisa Harrison, SR/WA and Daniel Stekol, IRWA's Vice President of Field Operations.

professionals to come together and define the professional guidelines needed to support infrastructure growth in their home countries. We believe that our chapters provide the best opportunity for these vital conversations to happen, in North America and around the world.

IRWA recently transformed several International Committees into CoPs. What are the benefits of this organizational change?

This shift in our organizational structure was made when we recognized that we were really underutilizing the amazing potential our discipline-specific committees have to serve as incubators for specialized knowledge management and provide an opportunity for global interaction around common problems and solutions. Prior to this change, many of the International Discipline Committees were very focused on administrative issues like membership requirements and dedicating much of their remaining energies to preparing discipline-specific sessions for the Annual Conference. Although critically important, those efforts had an extremely limited reach within our membership. Now, our discipline CoPs are becoming “places” where people who are passionate about what they do can learn how to do it better by collaborating with each other, developing a shared repertoire of resources and encouraging in each other a desire to improve their skillsets to better themselves and their profession.

How will a CoP work to engage our new members from outside North America?

A wonderful example of this occurred during our recent Annual Conference in Hartford, when a group of Nigerian appraisers walked into an International Valuation CoP meeting. Prior to this organizational shift, these non-committee members would probably have been relegated to “honored guest” status and invited to quietly observe as the committee conducted its regular, mostly administrative business. Under the new structure, these professionals were welcomed as immediate members of the community by virtue of their shared expertise. As such, they pulled up their chairs to the big conference table with the rest of the group and immediately began participating in passionate and meaningful discussions around current

valuation issues in their country and in ours. Later that afternoon, the CoP Chair shared with me what an incredible experience that had been for her, and how beautifully it illustrated the benefits she was only just beginning to appreciate.

With that in mind, and in the interest of giving all our CoPs a solid starting place from which to develop their own specific structures, we have commissioned a task force to create and document some recommended guidelines that will be issued later this Fall.

Which industry segment offers the most growth potential for membership?

That is a tough question because I see opportunities everywhere I look. The boom in the energy sector—oil and gas, as well as electric and utilities—probably offers the most immediate growth potential, as those industries are not just expanding in Canada and the United States, but also in Africa, Mexico and many other countries around the world. A standardized set of guidelines is urgently needed, and IRWA has taken the lead on these, in conjunction with industry stakeholders and federal partners. That said, we are creating a series of three courses for the electric and utilities industry that will draw new professionals to the IRWA for the body of knowledge we are assembling. We are also working on a credentialing program with the American Public Works Association that could revolutionize how we conduct outreach to the thousands of public agencies we serve. Finally, the transportation industry is going through a revival of innovation as we reimagine how people commute and agencies create new ways of maintaining existing highways and linking public transportation with business and housing. This is a great time to be in the right of way industry and an IRWA member.

Engaging young professionals is a challenge for all organizations, including ours. How do you see that evolving?

Best practices are starting to bubble up from our Chapters and Regions as young professionals become more involved in International Committees, CoPs and other activities at every level. We believe we are well on our way to attaining critical mass in this area and will continue to share what we learn across the Association.

What would you say about right of way as a career to someone just entering the workforce?

I believe the future is very bright, particularly for those who differentiate themselves with an IRWA credential. I also believe that as a member of this organization, you can learn and grow beyond anything you can imagine, both professionally and personally. You can surround yourself with exceptional and generous people, face a new set of challenges every day that will stimulate you intellectually and inspire you to push beyond your limits. You can even make a meaningful contribution to the world that will survive longer than you do. That’s why I’ve stuck around for over 22 years, and why I would do it again in a heartbeat if given the chance. 🌟



At the Incoming President’s Reception in June, Lee acknowledged her late mother, Helen Peck for instilling enthusiasm and a passion for the profession.