



Paying it Forward

Inside the mentor-protégé relationship

BY BARBARA BILLITZER

In 2013, IRWA launched a new Mentor Program designed to connect right of way newcomers with those who have industry experience to share. For veteran members, it's an opportunity to give back to the profession by sharing their insight, encouragement, resources and priceless support. For protégés who are motivated to learn and advance, it can be a life changing experience.



Mentor Lara Bailey, SR/WA has been inspired to give back to the profession.

The initial pilot program was held in conjunction with IRWA's 59th Annual Conference in Charleston, West Virginia, where mentors and protégés were matched up according to their background, experience and goals. One year later, we decided to follow up with a mentor-protégé team to learn more about the benefits of this relationship.

Longstanding member, Lara Bailey, SR/WA, R/W-NAC was one of the first mentors to volunteer for the program. A Senior Right of Way Specialist for M&N Operating Co. (Spectra Energy), Lara has 23 years of experience and is a member of IRWA's International Professional Development Committee. When asked why she decided to get involved with the mentor program, Lara said, "I'm continually looking for ways to give back to IRWA. It's important for me to pay it forward by sharing my experiences and knowledge with others who can benefit from it in their personal and professional lives."

Lara experienced the benefits of a mentor early in her career and credits her former Right of Way Supervisor, Ken Bertel, for teaching her everything he could about right of way. With Ken's guidance, she learned about title, types of easements and agreements, regulations, documentation, and so much more. Still today, she is grateful for his leadership and direction in helping her learn and understand so much about the profession.

"A protégé looks for a mentor who has already lived through the same or a similar circumstance. In this way, there is a real connection," said Lara. "When I was teamed up with Bryan Delos Reyes, it felt like a good fit. And the experience has been awesome."

At the time, Bryan had recently relocated back home to California, and he was looking to build a strong foundation. He had joined various organizations and was networking like crazy. Soon after becoming an IRWA member, Bryan heard about the



The future looks bright for protégé Bryan Delos Reyes.

mentor program and felt encouraged by the opportunity.

“As a protégé, the most beneficial part is having someone to guide you early on in your career,” said Bryan. “I have been fortunate to have had several mentors already. My first was a landman who taught me the principles of researching title in county courthouses. Next it was Timothy Slorby, the President of Dakota Land Services who cemented my right of way fundamentals. I think every professional needs a mentor. Someone who has walked a similar, but different path really paves the

way for career development. After all, even Kobe has a coach.”

During his three-year tenure in right of way, Bryan has worked on projects throughout the country. He started in Pennsylvania as a title abstractor and travelled to different courthouses researching surface ownership and drafting title reports. In North Dakota, he oversaw the acquisition of multi-line rights of way for oil, gas, and water gathering systems. When he felt cooped up inside the office, he ventured into the field to research title, negotiate with property owners, and meet with survey and construction crews.

The protégé/mentor relationship offers some real-time advantages. A good example is the time Bryan called Lara to discuss some questions about one of his projects. He was working on a project where there were two parallel common carrier pipelines beneath a county road. One line had been laid prior to road construction and was held under a private right of way line, and the second line was laid after construction and was under franchise. He had some urgent questions and really needed Lara’s expertise.

After explaining the scenario, Bryan’s questions were very specific: “Are the rights transferable between two different pipelines as long as they are both covered? For repairs or maintenance, would we

operate under the prior rights agreement or the franchise? If the first line were sold, would we be able to transfer and keep our prior rights under the second? Are there legal or ethical concerns? If we had two different right of way agreements, are these transferable between two different pipelines? Would they be tied to construction dates and the intention of parties at the time? Are there court cases to support a position?”

Lara was having dinner with some industry colleagues when she got Bryan’s call. The questions required subject matter expertise, and fortunately, between Lara and her colleagues, they were able to answer all of them. As a result, he was able to keep the project moving forward. “It has been a privilege to share my thoughts, advice, knowledge and experience with someone who is so anxious to learn. Bryan is like sponge wanting to soak up the experience. Because he wants to make the most of his job and grow professionally, he seeks advice and our conversations are heartfelt,” said Lara.

In sunny California, Bryan is now part of a team managing the abandonment and maintenance of all company pipelines in California. “Research, reporting and GIS are my main cogs as an integral part of this team. All in all, I am more than happy with my right of way career so far and look forward to what’s to come,” he said. ☺

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