

MEMBER SNAPSHOTS

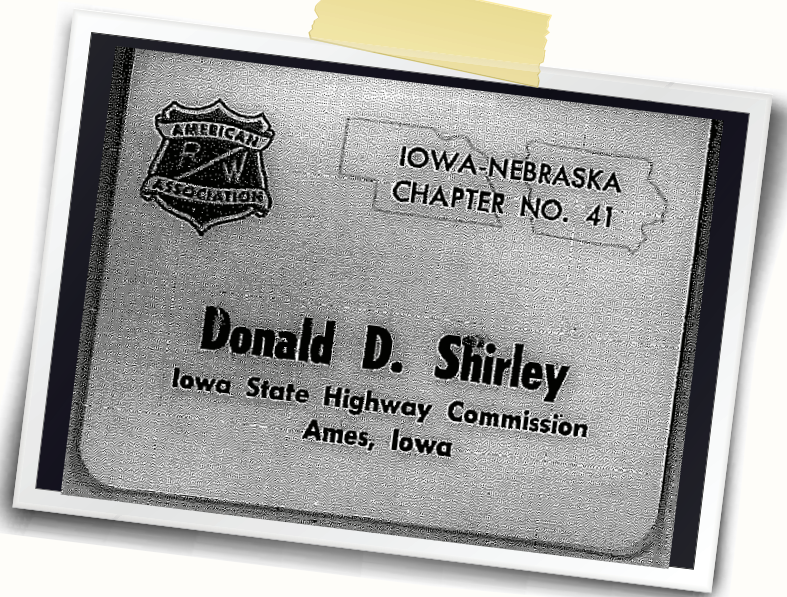
Donald Shirley celebrates 50 years with the IRWA



Donald Shirley began his career with the Iowa State Highway Commission in 1952 as part of the preliminary survey crew. 10 years later, he transferred into the Ames Office as a Design Technician with the Office of Right of Way—a field in which he would continue to thrive for decades.

Early in 1963, a new Chapter was forming within the IRWA (then called the American Right of Way Association), which would eventually become Iowa-Nebraska Chapter 41 before ultimately splitting into two

Chapters. Ray Callahan and Bill Davis represented Iowa and were instrumental in seeking out new members. They quickly noticed Don's interest in advancing his career and spoke to him about joining the Association. In turn, Don went to his supervisor for some advice on the matter, but was surprised when this idea was met with laughter. His supervisor not only called it a mistake, he also insisted it was only an excuse to be out of the office and to get a free meal. Fortunately, Don decided against this piece of advice and joined the Association anyway.



Soon after becoming a member, Don was elected as Assistant Secretary-Treasurer of Chapter 41. In those early years, meetings simply consisted of a guest speaker, lunch and general discussions. Unsurprisingly, finances were a constant struggle. But the wonderful thing about being part of something from its early days is the ability to witness major growth, which is exactly what Don experienced in his 50 years with the IRWA. In fact, Don can still recall the very first female member and has watched as women have grown to make up a giant share of active membership and hold significant leadership roles.

“I am extremely proud of our organization today [which is] under competent, fiscally sound leadership and provides educational opportunities which would otherwise not be possible,” Don reflects. He proudly points out that the Association has grown “from a joke in some minds 50 years ago to a worldwide recognized leader in the right of way field.”

As Chapter 41 continued to make its way toward financial stability, Don served and led many committees. In the late 1960s, the Association began holding educational meetings where members could gain credit for the SR/WA designation, and Don soon received his in 1970. In 1974, he was named “Man of the Year” by his Chapter. Don was honored with the Professional of the Year Award in 1984 after holding nearly all Chapter elective and appointive offices and after spending eight years on the International Special Awards Committee. Most recently, Don was presented with the Lifetime Professional Award in July of 2018. It is evident that Don has spent decades as a mentor and an inspiration to countless IRWA members.

“I still have my eyes on what I believe is a vibrant, healthy, growing organization,” Don remarks. “Chapter 41 is in good capable hands and will continue to contribute toward what began as a “good ol boys club” to what today is a leader in the right of way field.”

