

# Training the Next Generation



Florida State University graduates who completed ORC's training program, Matt Starling, William Bedford and Marvin Hearns.

## BY MARVIN HEARNS

Some agencies and consulting companies are not only taking steps to acknowledge the pending loss of baby boomer expertise, they are now searching for ways to prevent their knowledge base from disappearing. For example, some employers are recruiting college graduates into an entry level training program to give them time to transition into career paths before the retirement of the firm's knowledge base.

Back in 2006, I was a recent graduate of Florida State University, with bachelor's degrees in real estate, finance and business administration. My career opportunities were diverse. As part of my extensive interviewing process with O.R. Colan Associates (ORC), I was invited to attend a five-day introductory program presented by their in-house trainers, Bob Merryman, Lisa Barnes, Dick Moeller and Ted Pluta.

Attending this program gave me the opportunity to learn about the industry, the company, and its culture – before deciding whether or not this was the right place for me to begin my career. I was so impressed with their expertise and willingness to share their knowledge, that after attending the program, I knew it was the



Sponsored by the Real Estate Club at Florida State University, Kathy Rupar, ORC Vice President of Human Resources (pictured center), presented an industry overview to participating students.

right place. I came aboard confident that I would be trained and educated through ORC's formal Trainee Program and that I would have the opportunity to work within a diverse workplace.

My supervisor and I developed an individualized learning plan, and I was mentored by one of the senior agents in my project office. It was the perfect setting for learning. I was able to attend courses offered by our internal training staff, as well as courses sponsored by other professional organizations like IRWA, the Appraisal Institute and NHI. During my first year, I experienced a good mix of on-the-job training, technical training and classroom training. Once my year was up, I was given the opportunity to relocate to another project and continue my learning in another project office with a different type of client and workload.

I feel fortunate that my employer recognizes the unique environment we are facing – a diverse workplace and retiring baby boomers. CEO Catherine Muth notes, "In the past, consulting firms have been able to depend on attracting their workforce from state departments of transportation and retirees from federal agencies, but these agencies have systematically downsized over the last decade. We recognized this trend and made a strategic decision to invest in a Trainee Program that will ensure our company has the internal resources to meet future needs."

I am fortunate that my employer's trainee program combines courses offered by IRWA, NHI and the Appraisal Institute in combination with hands on experience in a broad range of tasks to give me the skills needed to become a right of way professional. Those who have the opportunity to benefit from a structured training program that acknowledges and appreciates generational diversity will be best suited to become the future leaders of our industry. ☺