

Growing New Leaders



Incoming chapter officers, from left, Michael Bulzomi, Treasurer; Julie Aune, SR/WA, Secretary; Kerri Wittman, SR/WA, Vice President; Tom Paine, SR/WA, President-Elect; Thomas P. Stowe, SR/WA (Jr.), President; and past president Thomas C. Stowe, SR/WA.

BY FAITH A. ROLAND, SR/WA

As a past president of Chapter 4, I had the good fortune to attend the Puget Sound Chapter 4 Installation and Past President's Recognition Dinner this past summer. It was a celebration of where we have been and where we are headed.

As we support and encourage our new leadership each year, it is important to continue to draw on the strengths and talents of those past leaders who continue to be willing to guide, mentor, console and encourage a new crop of chapter leadership. We had nine past presidents in attendance, a testament to their continued, active involvement in our Chapter and our Association.

We were also privileged to have as our installing officer, past president,



Thomas C. Stowe, SR/WA, (Sr.) Chapter 1 president in 1970, served as installation officer for the Puget Sound, Chapter 4 event.

Thomas C. Stowe, SR/WA, who served as Chapter 1 president in 1970. Tom began his right of way career well before the majority of attendees and incoming officers were born, and it was an honor to listen to a historical accounting from the beginnings of our Association. Tom is also the father of our incoming President, Thomas P. Stowe, SR/WA.

Here are some words of wisdom from his speech:

"Thank you for allowing me to install the new Puget Sound Chapter 4 Officers of the International Right of way Association. This Chapter has a long and proud history. The Chapter was founded January 4, 1952. These incoming officers will be the 55th slate to serve this position."

Before I do, I want to say a few words about this Association. I joined the then American Right of Way Association in Los Angeles in 1951, that's 56 years ago! At the time we had two chapters, Los Angeles and San Francisco. Our international chapter count is now 76 active chapters.

When I joined, I was working as a Right of Way Agent for the California Division of Highways, which later became CalTrans. It was my privilege to work directly on a daily basis for Frank Balfour, the principle founder of this Association. Frank was a huge man, stood about 6'4", weighed in over 300, had ham sized hands and was a prodigious eater. He was a flamboyant dresser who favored green tweed suits, loud ties and always wore a broad brimmed beaver fur hat! You had no trouble recognizing him. Kind of a Teddy Roosevelt personality.

He worked 12 hour days and expected all his agents to do the same. We were hired by taking a Civil Service examination, which had a written test and an oral interview. We were told in the oral that we would be expected to work in the evenings, and that we would not be paid extra.

Frank was a famous memo writer. Some of the more memorable memos included what became know as the "Lavoris Instruction" – no one better be caught dealing with the public if you had bad breath, or were unshaved. By the way, it was not until the 60's that there were any lady right of way agents. Frank did not think it was safe for them to go into strange homes at night. Another memo cautioned all appraisers and negotiators that we were the Right of Way Department, NOT the Welfare department!

Frank and the Association were coterminous. From the beginning, the Association had its primary emphasis – Education. Our multi-disciplined profession had to teach itself, since there were no college courses or degrees that touched on all the things a right of way person had to know, which included engineering, law, real estate, title, public relations and personal contact.

The Association provided a place for the different agencies, public and private, to network, and discuss common problems and how to solve them. It was and is invaluable. Frank and all of the founders would have been very proud to see the strength and purpose of Chapter 4. You embody what the Association is meant to be. It is your duty to continue to emphasize the goals of education and ethical behavior.

Now let us proceed with the installation...."

So how do we grow new leaders anyway? Clearly, Thomas C. Stowe, SR/WA (Sr.) instilled in his son a commitment to professionalism,

ethics and leadership. Thomas P. Stowe, SR/WA (Jr.) will carry the determination and commitment of his father as he leads Chapter 4 as our newly installed President in the coming year. For those of us who were not born into the family of right of way, but simply happened into it one day as I did, we can and should draw on the continued strength of our past leaders.

As a novice working in government and right of way for the first time, I remember the late John H. Netzley, SR/WA and former past president of Chapter 4. My second day on the job, John came by my desk and handed me an application for membership in the IRWA. He said I would benefit greatly from getting involved in this organization. Little did he or I know just how right he was!

Today, I challenge each of you to take the next step toward growing a new leader – be it yourself or another. If you have been a previous leader in our Association, take the time and interest in a new member of your chapter. Be that mentor and friend to help others see the benefits of active chapter involvement. Be that friendly arm around the shoulder of a new member, encouraging them to get involved right from the beginning. We should have no stranger walk into a chapter meeting, educational course or event, that doesn't get a warm and friendly welcome to the IRWA family. Share with others the benefits you have received. And if you are new, I encourage you to stand up and say "I want to participate fully" in this organization. The benefits will last a lifetime.

Our Association continues to prosper and grow due to the strength of our leaders at all levels of governance. My congratulations to the new leadership of Chapter 4 and my thanks to Tom Sr., for helping bring one of them along. 🍷



From left, incoming Chapter President, Thomas P. Stowe, SR/WA (Jr.) receives gavel from immediate past president of Chapter 1, Jerry C. Sidwell.