

The Evolution of Independent Wireless Associations

BY WAYNE BARNETT



The wireless telecommunications industry has been through a roller coaster ride of economic peaks and valleys over the past few years, but for now it seems to have leveled out to a steady growth. With industry consolidations, new technology implementations, and an ever increasing demand for wireless voice and data services, it could be said that there has

never been a better time to be involved in the industry. A client base composed of traditional wireless carriers, wireless broadband providers and a multitude of growth-oriented tower companies, are demanding services from site acquisition professionals, title companies, surveyors, environmental analysts and asset managers. From a network deployment standpoint,

everyone is faced with the need to meet very specific coverage objectives with limited budgets.

Wireless carriers are also tasked with finding ways to cut costs on existing leases, enhance return on investment through collocation leasing and even perform cost/benefit analysis on individual



sites prior to lease renewal. With the industry focused on steady growth through wise investments and informed decision making, there is a real need for knowledgeable professionals managing and performing network development projects. Add to this scenario the continually constricting regulatory and zoning demands, and it is clear that the time has come for professionals from all disciplines within the wireless infrastructure industry to unite in an effort to meet today's challenges.

That spirit of unity is driving a movement that is sweeping across America to establish statewide wireless associations composed of industry professionals from all facets of the wireless telecommunications industry, including wireless carriers, tower companies and site development service vendors. The first state wireless association began in East Tennessee in 2000. Since then, associations have also been established in Alabama, Georgia, Florida, Louisiana and Mississippi. All of the existing associations share the common goals of educating local and state public officials about the role of the wireless industry and its benefits, cultivating relationships between the various members of the industry, strengthening the relationships between the industry and the local communities they serve, and ensuring the continued growth and development of the wireless industry. Meeting programs have centered on current "hot topics" faced by the wireless development industry such as pending legislation and regulatory changes that impact site development activities.

While each of these associations are independent of all others and not affiliated with any national organization, they are receiving support from PCIA, The Wireless

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Infrastructure Association. This support is being provided through the State Wireless Association Program (SWAP), which was officially formed in January 2005. SWAP assists existing wireless associations with publicity and provides groups working to establish new statewide wireless associations with a support network made up of individuals who have experience in launching statewide wireless associations, templates for useful documents such as By-Laws, and a Guide for Establishing State Wireless Associations. Pat Tant of AAT Communications was instrumental in launching multiple state wireless associations and was the primary contributor to the contents of this guide. Concerning her involvement in the formation of these associations, Pat comments, “The concept behind state wireless associations is to cultivate the relationships among all members of the wireless arena with local communities to ensure a unified message that supports our industry. AAT Communications, along with many other industry leaders, is proud to be a part of providing solutions to our industry.” Pat served as Vice President of

the Tennessee, Alabama and Georgia Wireless Associations until last year when she and AAT decided to devote their time and resources to the development of the national SWAP campaign. AAT Communications will host SWAP Centerstage at the 2005 PCIA trade show this fall.

As we move into the future of the wireless industry, the role that these associations play may continue to evolve, but without a doubt, they will remain a part of tomorrow's industry landscape.

The proliferation of these associations across the nation may serve as a gateway for entrance into the wireless telecommunications industry by right of way professionals currently comprising IRWA's membership. Leadership roles will need to be filled across the country by bright professionals with a good knowledge base in the core disciplines that make up the right of way profession. As the professionals currently serving other industries migrate into the wireless industry, the industry itself will benefit from the knowledge, experience and credentials that they bring with them. Reciprocally, the IRWA may find a new source for potential members who are hungry for the knowledge and credentials that the IRWA can provide through its education programs. The time is right for the integration of right of way professionals currently serving more traditional industries into the wireless telecommunications industry, and the gateway is open.

For additional information on this topic, or to find out how to start a statewide wireless association in your area, visit www.swapprogram.net or contact Pat Tant at pat.tant@aatcommunications.com.