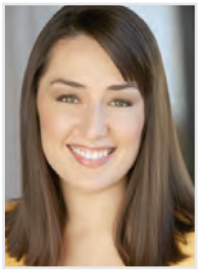
A SHARED VISION

Young professionals build momentum at the regional level

BY AIMIE MIMS, RWP, R/W-AMC



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In my region, we are fortunate to have an active and engaged group of members that now comprise Region 3's Young Professionals Group. The group has evolved over the past year, thanks to the 2014 Young Professionals Symposium held in conjunction with IRWA's Annual International Education Conference in Hartford, CT. The symposium brought together a group of interested young professionals who share a joint vision and a desire to be part of the IRWA's future success.

Following the symposium, we became inspired to put our plans into action. With six chapters in our region, we recognized that each chapter might lack the resources to launch their own young professional group. In assessing the best way to move forward, we decided to assemble a larger regional group where we could build some real momentum. Our goal was to create a framework where we could come together to establish and cultivate our voice, learn to navigate the opportunities within IRWA, and network with our peers and industry leaders.

To get started, we formed the Region 3 Young Professionals Steering Committee, which includes Jake Farrell, Brent Lundgren, SR/WA, Brett Farner, Michelle MacMillan, ARWP, Mindy Leadholm and myself. Bimonthly calls were organized so that we could focus in on the group's mission, solidify our goals and plan our launch. We solicited ideas and insight from IRWA's Manager of Field Operations Tim Drennan, who helped us find ways to align with the Association and understand some of the lessons learned from other successful groups, such as the Region 2 Young Professionals.

Social Media Presence

One of our first action items was setting up social media accounts on the IRWA Member Network and LinkedIn, an effective way to engage and communicate with other professionals. By creating an online presence for Region 3 Young Professionals, we were able to promote our progress, improve our visibility, garner support from a wide base of right of way professionals, and generate interest in

what we were up to – and it worked! By inviting every member of Region 3 to join our LinkedIn group, we rapidly accumulated over 70 members. This led to an outpouring of positive feedback, which largely speaks to the effectiveness of our social media campaign.

Value of Face-to-Face

As valuable as social media is as a communication and networking tool, meeting face-to-face is essential for brainstorming about the path forward, networking and getting to know one another. In conjunction with the Region 3 Fall Forum in October, we officially kicked off with our first in-person meeting in Larchwood, Iowa, where we welcomed 14 young professionals from all over our great region.

Although it was the first time many of us had met, the group dynamic was energetic and enthusiastic with some of the best and brightest young professionals in attendance. The Steering Committee led team-building activities designed to get the group thinking about the value and resources we can provide to one another, as well as obstacles to success and what we can do as a group to overcome them. We successfully accomplished our meeting goals and plan to build on this success by coordinating our future events with our Region's Spring and Fall Forums in 2015.

The Region 3 Young Professionals Group leveraged traditional marketing and social media to engage members from the six chapters in their region.

Building Momentum

Remaining connected to the larger Association is essential. It ensures continuity among our groups, while giving us the flexibility to remain responsive to the particular needs and wants of our Region's young professional members. We appreciate the opportunities to collaborate with our Association leaders in our own paths to leadership, and look forward to becoming involved in IRWA's SUCCESSion Planning, Mentorship Program and Leadership Institute initiatives.

Our vision would not have been realized without the hard work and dedication of the Steering Committee and the support of all the Chapters in Region 3, who donated time and financial support. Tim Drennan, International Secretary Jeff Jones, SR/WA, and Region 3 Chair Mike Murray, SR/WA, R/W-NAC were also instrumental in making this event a success. We encourage any young professional to join Region 3's Young Professionals group on LinkedIn or the IRWA Member Network, where you will find the latest information on our events and discussion topics. All are welcome! Together, we can continue to build momentum and shape the future of IRWA. ✪