

# A New Cross-Cultural Relationship

Saudi Aramco land professionals join IRWA's expanding membership



The Class of 2013: From Saudi Aramco's Land Affairs Department, front row from left, Mohammad Dossary, Khalid Sharaif, Al-Ageel Bassam, IRWA Instructor David Burgoyne, SR/WA, Ghada Hajiri, IRWA Instructor Clyde Johnson, SR/WA, R/W-RAC, R/W-URAC, Salim Alalyani, Hadi Sawad, Zeyad Alyan and Adel Qahtani. Back row, Hameed Medani, Muad Ghulaiga, Ahmed Dossary and Majed Qahtani.

**BY BARBARA BILLITZER**

Over the last several years, IRWA has garnered unparalleled interest from professional organizations outside of North America. This interest has morphed into not only more members, but the opportunity to form new IRWA chapters around the world.

The Saudi Aramco story began in 2009, when one of their land professionals attended IRWA's Annual International Education Conference. One conversation led to another, and with each passing year, more of their land representatives came to the conferences. As of June 2013, twelve of the Saudi Aramco land professionals have joined as members of the Association, and they are well on their way to earning IRWA's Right of Way Agent Certification.

## An Evolving Relationship

It was just four years ago when the first representative from the oil company Saudi Aramco attended IRWA's Annual Conference in Indianapolis, IN. At the time, Randy Williams, SR/WA, MAI, FRICS was the International Secretary. As Randy recalls, "One of our conference attendees seemed to know that I was an IRWA officer, and he approached me and introduced himself."

Abdelhameed Al-Medani, a Land Affairs Consultant at Saudi Aramco, explained that his goal for attending conference was to gain more insight into the Association and determine how Saudi Aramco might benefit from IRWA's educational courses and credentialing opportunities.



At the 2012 Annual Conference in Seattle, IRWA's International Executive Committee met with delegates from Saudi Aramco to discuss professional development opportunities.



In 2011, Mark Tucker, Saudi Aramco's Land Protection Administrator, met with the IEC in Atlanta.



In July 2012, Saudi Aramco's Umar Al-Abdullatif and Mark Tucker met with Executive Vice President Mark Rieck (left) at IRWA Headquarters to solidify plans.



From Saudi Aramco's Land Affairs Department, Salim Alalyani has served as a liaison in coordinating the classes with IRWA.

Randy was intrigued. After all, Saudi Aramco is the world's largest oil company, supplying roughly one out of every 10 barrels of oil globally.

"I wanted him to feel welcome and offered to introduce him to some of our members," said Randy. "It was the first morning of conference when all the International Committees were holding their meetings. The International Pipeline Committee seemed the best fit, so I escorted him to their meeting and asked the Committee Chair if I could introduce him. The committee members welcomed him and encouraged him to stay for the meeting. I believe that their warm reception helped the Association create

an overall positive experience. It was also a great way to connect him with some of our leaders in the pipeline industry."

Over the next two years, Saudi Aramco representatives continued to attend the Annual Conferences, and in 2011, the International Executive Committee held a planning session with Mark Tucker, Saudi Aramco's Land Protection Administrator to discuss professional development programs. At that meeting, Mark told the IEC that he anticipated that roughly 40 professionals from Saudi Aramco's Land Affairs Department were interested in joining IRWA as members and in becoming credentialed.

## Solidifying the Plan

The following year, staff from Saudi Aramco's Land Affairs Department attended the 2012 Annual Conference in Seattle, WA, where they participated in and passed IRWA's Course 219: Introduction to Presentation, Instruction and Facilitation. During a meeting with the IEC, Abdelhameed provided background on Saudi Aramco's Land Affairs Department, sharing that 40 land professionals would be taking the lead in partnering with the company's Facilities Planning, Exploration and Appraisal Departments and were seeking professional development in the areas of appraisal, asset management, negotiation, acquisition and relocation.

In July 2012, Mark Tucker and Umar Al-Abdullatif, Manager of Land Affairs at Saudi Aramco, traveled to IRWA Headquarters in Los Angeles to outline their goals and discuss next steps. As noted by IRWA Executive Vice President Mark Rieck, "Our team at Headquarters put together a professional development proposal that included a three-year program where IRWA would present courses on-site at their headquarters in Dhahran, Saudi Arabia. We solidified plans for the first 12 land professionals to become members and outlined the pathway for earning the SR/WA Designation," said Mark.

By the end of the year, Saudi Aramco had selected the first two IRWA courses to be presented. They included Course 100: Principles of Land Acquisition, and Course 103: Ethics and the Right of Way Profession. After a series of discussions, two IRWA Instructors were selected and contracted to make the trip to Dhahran. They were Master Instructor David Burgoyne, SR/WA and Clyde Johnson, SR/WA, R/W-URAC, R/W-RAC, IRWA's 2012 Instructor of the Year.

## The Teaching Experience

Following a 17-hour flight that spanned 7,400 miles, Clyde and David began their teaching adventure in May 2013. As the first day of class in Dhahran approached, Clyde says that he and David were initially a bit apprehensive.

"We wondered how to relate our land acquisition laws and procedures to Saudi requirements," said Clyde. "But our concerns vanished within the first few minutes of our meeting. We quickly realized that, while our laws and regulations may differ, the issues, concerns and desire to treat people fairly is a universal goal. Our biggest take-away from this experience was that we have much more in common than we realized."

David found teaching in Saudi Arabia to be an incredibly rewarding experience. "The Saudi Aramco Land Affairs staff were incredibly gracious hosts and treated us with the utmost

respect and hospitality," said David. "There are a myriad of similarities between the Saudis and North Americans as people, as well as similarities in our respective land acquisition systems. Because of this, the Saudis can not only learn a great deal from us, but we can also learn from them, especially in the areas of technology and GIS."

Clyde and David formed some lasting friendships. Since their return, they have been working on getting Saudi Aramco involved in the 2014 Annual Conference with a session on the company's use of GIS and a panel discussion on encroachments. "To say that we are excited to have them attend our conferences and share their expertise with our membership is an understatement," said Clyde.

David believes this new relationship truly embodies the spirit of our international organization. "You will be rewarded if you make the effort to get to know these most recent additions to our organization," said David.

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## A Classroom Perspective

"The classroom experience was excellent," said Salim Mansour Alalyani, one of the 12 land affairs professionals who attended the two classes. With a Bachelor's degree in GIS, Salim began his Saudi Aramco career as a Cartography Specialist in 2010.

After attending the Principles of Land Acquisition course, Salim commented, "We deal with all of the same aspects covered in the course, whether directly or through other departments within our company. The instructors demonstrated an exceptional level of experience and knowledge, and there was a great deal of interaction between us. We were comparing the laws, regulations and practices between Saudi Arabia and the United States and found there are a lot of similarities," he said.



The course participants graciously hosted a traditional dinner for the instructors, who formed lasting relationships during their trip.

When asked about some of the obstacles he currently faces with his projects, Salim said, “In land acquisition, there are certain challenges in determining the land’s history and whether it is decided by someone or not. The primary reason for this is because we do not have a land registry agency in our country, which mandates us to do a bigger effort.”

The class participants found the ethics course to be of great interest, especially the section covering IRWA’s Rules of Professional Conduct. They appreciated the interactive nature of the session, as it gave them the opportunity to apply the rules they had learned and solve case scenarios posed by the instructors. “This session has given some essential guidelines for interpreting the rules and determining how to apply them on real projects. I think these principles should be guiding every single employee,” said Salim.

## Looking Forward

Now that 12 of Saudi Aramco’s Land Affairs staff have taken and passed these courses, they have already selected

Course 213: Conflict Management as the next one. While their ultimate goal is the SR/WA Designation, once they complete Course 213, they will satisfy the requirements for IRWA’s Right of Way Agent Certification.

Randy Williams, now an active member of IRWA’s newly-formed International Relations Group, finds the international demand for IRWA membership and courses validating. He was on the IEC when South Africa Chapter 83 was formed, the first to be formalized outside of North America. The relationship with the South Africans dates back to 1998, when representatives began attending IRWA’s Annual Conferences. Today, that Chapter boasts more than 115 members.

Pleased with the progress made with Saudi Aramco, Randy looks forward to a longstanding relationship. “The addition of these Saudi Aramco members is another step forward for the Association. The insight and perspective they offer us is invaluable and helps raise the visibility of our Association, our education, and our professional credentials,” said Randy.