The Unknown

Sharing mutual admiration and respect

BY RONN CARLENTINE, SR/WA

Some folks tend to downplay the impact they have on others, but it is the unknown hero that deserves recognition. Yet, this is the kind of person who doesn’t seek it nor expect it. For that reason, it seems worthy to pay honor to an individual whose name will never appear in the books of history. He is someone who never won a sweepstakes or lottery. What he did win was a career in the right of way profession—working for a public agency where he was challenged with solving all the problems that crossed his path.

I chose this unknown member because I know his story particularly well. He was 20 years old when he began in the right of way profession. He was grandfathered into a professional organization known as the American Right of Way Association. He had little money but exhibited the confidence of a lion. He would work long days and nights on his journey to the top. The pot of gold at the end of his rainbow was the personal satisfaction of a job well done and the opportunity to give a pat on the back to those who were responsible for successfully completing the project.

This right of way agent was not afraid of hard work. As the years went on, he heard about a job with a larger public agency. It appealed to his nature, as the pursuits of career and challenge were traits of his. With his dedication to the profession, it was no wonder that other people admired his abilities and followed in his footsteps.

While I had not planned to identify this person, I can tell you that he gave me my first right of way job. And he inspired and
motivated me to become an active member of the Association. He was quite the mentor. A rugged individualist, he was the kind of man that blazed the trail. And this was a trail that many followed because of his strong commitment to family, work and the Association.

Sure, he had the bulldog in him—someone who would not be deterred by walking through a snowstorm. On the other hand, he had the sensitivity of a teddy bear. When after-work hours came, the office staff descended upon him. They enjoyed his company and jumped at the opportunity to stop by his house for some food and drink, thanks to the hospitality of his wonderful wife.

With his talents, intellect and understanding of all aspects of the right of way profession, there were numerous business opportunities to induce him back to work after retirement. But because it was fashionable to retire when one could, he and his wife sold their house and went to live on the coastal bluff of retirement-ville. His office staff and local chapter recognized the contributions he made to the right of way profession and presented him with many plaques and awards for his service. He would go on to live a long life because he was part of a hearty breed. He was in a hospital bed just once, and he told the doctor to make the best of it because he wasn’t coming back again in his lifetime. Even in retirement, he continued to get up at 5:30 am in the morning. He had done it all his life, and no one could stop him.

Knowing this unknown hero has enhanced my life, and I will be forever grateful.

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