



BY JESSICA BROWN

# The Culture of Our Organization

Reflections from a young entrepreneur



While planning the 2017 Region 4 Spring Forum—which was hosted by Chapter 14 in Baltimore—our Board realized we were also due to celebrate our 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary. We could not let such a milestone occur without a proper acknowledgement. So on the last day of the successful Forum, we had a beautiful dinner and program at Camden Yards. During that evening, I found myself making several observations about what it means to be an IRWA member.

## Many of our active members are Past Presidents and have served in every role on our Board.

During the anniversary program, we recognized every Past President since our Chapter's inception. To my surprise, as the years became more recent, more and more of our active members were standing up for recognition. Since I became a member in 2014, I had unknowingly worked with many of our Past Presidents for various IRWA-related purposes. This is the culture of our organization. We work, we lead, and when our tenure is over, we do some more work. This is what commitment looks like. The IRWA is more than a stepping stone to a better job, promotion or more clients. The IRWA is a family that humbly works together to improve our industry, while leading the way in global real estate infrastructure.

## Our seasoned members literally experienced the change from a “boys club” to an industry that heralds inclusion and diversity.

That evening, I had the pleasure of conversing with one of our most active members who is a Past Chapter President, and a mentor to many industry professionals. She recounted her experience as the only black woman in her office, new to the industry, 35 years ago. She explained that while she and her supervisor had some outward differences, he never made her feel unwelcomed or excluded. They developed a wonderful relationship that continues to this day. In fact, he's still an active member! This relationship and countless others paved the way for more women and minorities like me to join our industry and contribute to the IRWA's rich history.

## Entrepreneurship is a key part of our story, and perhaps, our future.

Several of our members have recently retired and I always ask, “What's next?” Unsurprisingly, these committed infrastructure experts are often not quite ready to completely leave the workforce. Some of them have found part-time work with small businesses in our Chapter. Others are considering starting companies of their own. Since they enjoy a deep wellspring of trusted

professional connections built over the years, the transition from employee to business owner is often a smooth journey.

I am both a young professional and an entrepreneur. Joining the IRWA has been the best decision I have made in my career and my business. Over the past 3 years, I continue to be amazed by the amount of professionalism, integrity and humility demonstrated by the people in my Chapter, as well as the organization as a whole. Our 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary demonstrated to me that IRWA membership does not have to be a passing fancy or a blip on the career screen. Indeed, the culture of the IRWA is one of commitment, mentorship and continuous service. As a young professional, I am very proud to continue our traditions and contribute to our already stellar legacy. 🌟



*Jessica Brown is President and Owner of Fuller Brown Land Services, a right of way company based in Baltimore, Maryland. She is currently serving as a YP Representative for Region 4.*