PERSEVERING THROUGH A GLOBAL PANDEMIC

Techniques utilized by the right of way industry

The Covid-19 pandemic continues to have major impacts throughout the entire world. According to the United Nations, "We are facing a global health crisis unlike any in the 75-year history of the United Nations… but this is much more than a health crisis. It is a human, economic and social crisis." With social distancing in place, everyday tasks such as a trip to the grocery store or even a simple walk in the park have been altered to keep people safe. But even more important than these everyday adjustments, the impacts of this global pandemic on students and employees have been enormous.

Over the past few months, the way business is conducted within the right of way industry has been put to the test. However, more and more we are seeing countless right of way professionals rise to the occasion. As Darryl Root, RW/RAC, wrote in the May/June 2020 issue of Right of Way Magazine, "While the virus has changed the way we carry out our right of way tasks, in many ways it has strengthened the core values of our profession."

Right of way professionals have utilized technology and teamwork to adjust and persevere through countless challenges presented by these ever-evolving times. We are proud to present the following collection of articles written by IRWA members who have all discovered strategies and techniques to ensure their work prevails.

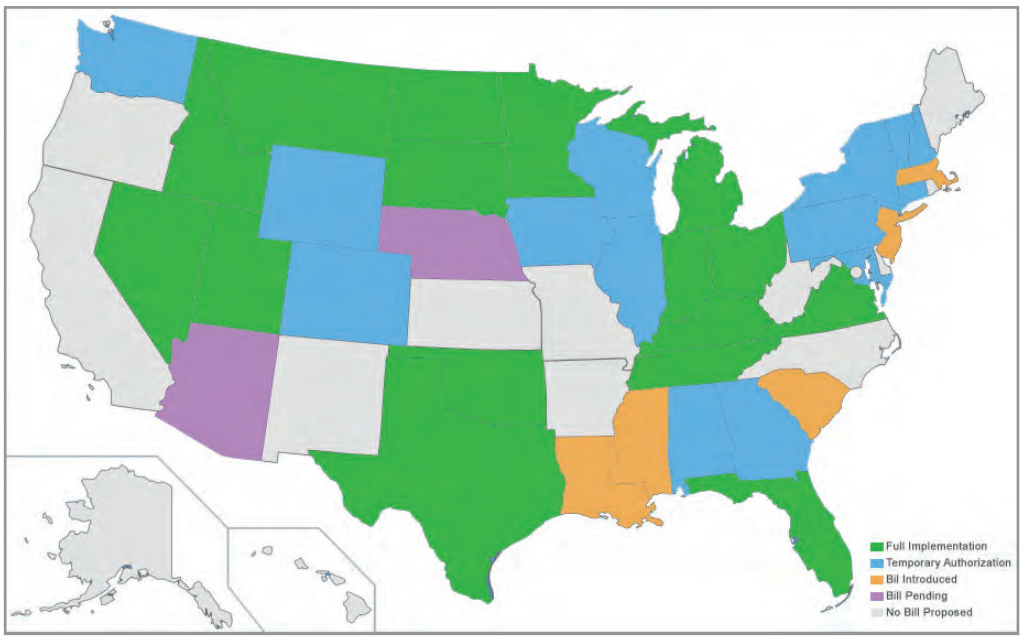
THE REMOTE ONLINE NOTARY

A timely solution

BY STEVE CHASTAIN, SR/WA

A college professor of mine once defined a "teachable moment" as that point in time when the introduction of information intersects the need for that information. This has always captured my imagination. We are inundated with new ideas daily and sometimes, like Capt. Jack Sparrow and the opportunity to do the right thing, we choose to "…wave at them as they pass by." However, if that information comes to us at a time when we find purpose in its application, *voila!* Suddenly learning occurs and we pick up something useful that we carry with us for life.

That's the case for me with the remote online notary. Virginia legalized its use in 2012, but until this year's global pandemic I didn't really know what it was or how it might benefit our industry. The remote online notary (or RON) is a term used to describe a notarial process where the party notarizing a document, the party signing the document and even the witnesses are not required to be physically in the same location. A document can be signed, witnessed and notarized electronically using video conferencing technology, identity proofing and credential analysis software without any person to person contact. Until recently, it was only legal in 16 states with bills introduced or pending in seven other states. Since the outbreak of COVID-19, numerous other states (but not all) have rushed to enact emergency or temporary authorizations to allow the use of an RON due to CDC social distancing guidelines.



March 2020

The RON is not *just* an answer to social distancing. If you've ever had to find a notary in Map Dot, USA on a Saturday afternoon or any day after normal business hours, you will immediately appreciate the value that being able to dial in a notary brings. Maybe your firm just won a contract in a state where you have no brick and mortar presence. Becoming a notary usually requires residency in the state in which you're operating along with an application process, training, etc. The RON removes all those barriers and allows you to hit the ground running. In addition, if you're already a notary in your state and RONs are legally permissible, you may be able to become an RON.

Safety Measures

An important common thread found in many states is the requirement for RONs to either be employed by or a contractor for an approved vendor. States have taken these measures to ensure the integrity of the process with mandated guidelines intended to protect the public against fraud. Approved vendors can uniformly comply with statutory requirements for eSignatures, eStamps, eJournals, picture-in-picture video capture, identity proofing and credential analysis.

Identity proofing uses a Knowledge Based Authentication (KBA) software which takes information provided by the signee (such as the last four digits of a Social Security number) and generates a list of questions unique to that signee. If they are unable to answer a required number of the questions, their identity is not verified and a second set of questions is generated for their response. Credential analysis software takes information from a government ID such as a driver's license and runs that data through a national database to confirm identity. Identity Proofing and Credential Analysis are not required in all states and their use is often offered by vendors at an additional fee. That said, you can easily see that the process can provide very secure identification.

Finally, vendors can store transaction records for whatever term a state may require (10 years in one state) and make those records available to that state's Secretary of State (SOS) for audit purposes as required. The cost of these vendor services is not uniform and varies with the volume of transactions desired. Most provide multiple options for monthly/annual subscriptions or document by document fees. My research showed that a typical per document fee was in the $25 range. There are other fees associated with subscriptions and I encourage you to examine multiple vendors to find a service that fits your specific needs.

Most importantly, check with your state's SOS and your legal counsel to determine what is legally permissible in your state. There are vendors that offer to provide service in all 50 states even if your state does not recognize RONs as legally permissible. These firms contend that under the Full Faith and Credit Clause of the US Constitution each state is required to respect the "public acts, records, and judicial proceedings of every other state." They also reference similar statutes within each of the 50 states and the District of Columbia referencing the acceptance of out of state notaries. I found that my home state of NC's SOS disagreed with this position. Until a temporary authorization bill was passed on May 4, 2020, the use of a video notary in NC was prohibited. If your state has a fully implemented RON program, your SOS will have guidelines for you to follow and will likely reference approved vendors from which to choose. If your state is operating under a temporary or emergency authorization allowing RONs be sure you are aware of the terms, limitations and expiration date. ✪

Finally, these are some resources that you can reference for more detailed information:

- ***NationalNotary.org – The National Notary Association***
- ***Alta.org – The American Land Title Association***
- ***ORC Webinar (free) – The Remote Online Notary - https://orcolan.com/webinar-remote-online-notary/***

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TEACHING OR LEARNING?

IRWA instructors adjust to the online platform

BY WILLIAM BUSCH, SR/WA

Life is a never-ending series of opportunities to learn. I've had my doubts about virtual courses, touting the benefits of getting to meet other colleagues and interacting in a classroom setting. That was my mindset; could anything change my mind?

In February, I received the invitation to instruct the SR/WA Study Session and Capstone Exam in Wisconsin in early May. There wasn't a lot of time to prepare, but it was enough. The contract was signed, and airline and hotel reservations were secured.

One never stops learning. I have taught in 22 states; in Texas at 110 degrees and in Indiana when it was -50 degrees. I have taught next to a go-cart racetrack and above a bowling alley. I have learned to adapt. Nevertheless, a couple weeks later, I was thrown a daunting challenge.

A Quick Response

Mid-March reactions to COVID-19 went into overdrive. The course coordinator emailed me on the last day of March that all hotels had closed and airline flights were terminated! Everyone

was to shelter in place at home! With only six weeks left until the course, cancellation was imminent. The SR/WA candidates needed the course to culminate five or more years of hard work and study. Could anything be done to save the class?

In late March, IRWA Headquarters (HQ) was pushing to respond to the COVID-19 travel limitations by rolling out classes under a new GAP program. Concurrently, they were evaluating new software to improve virtual class delivery. Though slammed by the workload, they considered our request to include the SR/WA Study Session as an early offering of the GAP program. In late April, they loaded the class on to the Newrow virtual classroom platform and uploaded all the course materials (including the exams) nearly the same day the contract with the new provider was signed by IRWA. It was a Herculean effort. Victory for the candidates and kudos to the team! But now what?

Creating a Plan

With only a couple of weeks left until the class, an action plan was needed. First a SWOT analysis was performed.

Strengths: I worked conferences online with European affiliates. I have three grandchildren to help with technical issues. I know the content. I'm motivated to succeed.

Weaknesses: I have no experience with the software platform Newrow and little experience with laptop audio and video production. I am uncertain about standing or sitting for three days. The visual platform might constrain getting people engaged. The use of class engaging tools will be limited.

Opportunities: I can re-think course delivery and create some new tools. I can create pre-recorded video segments that can be re-used in the future. We can instantly move students in and out of breakout rooms (in class, it always takes extra time and requires refocusing participants). I can wear shorts and no one will know.

Threats: The loss of internet at a critical time. Some students may not have the technical ability to sign in and communicate on the platform. I may end up showing something in my office environment that detracts from the presentation. My lighting and sound capability may be inadequate.

ACTION:

1) Re-organize my office using advice from a handy professional decorator (my wife Marjorie); ditch unnecessary furniture; eliminate clutter; acquire a variable height computer platform, so I can sit or stand as I present; add a portable podium and a new modern desk to facilitate management of materials during the presentation.

2) Practice logging on and off Newrow; learn how to add presentation files, how to place participants in breakout rooms and how to administer the test on the new platform. IRWA HQ was instrumental in training and answering many technical questions.

3) Practice making video clips so I could evaluate sound and video projection. This revealed that headphones and better lighting were needed. It helped me set my visual background, the angle of my computer camera and my distancing from the computer. I was creating what is now my studio in place of an office.

4) IRWA HQ provided a pre-class login day for students, which minimized their technical issues.

5) Revise my lesson plans so that typical classroom dynamics are modified for the Virtual platform.

Time for the Virtual Class

I kept tugging back at the calendar, but it kept racing forward. Was I ready? The day came and each participant's face popped up on the screen. Then I knew I was ready! It was surprisingly easy to move students in and out of breakout rooms. I could easily silence all mics when presenting to reduce background noise, use the chat feature to receive messages from students and enable them to use white boards in their breakout rooms. Admittedly, it was challenging to transfer the whiteboard information back to the larger group, but this is an issue that is being worked on with the developer.

The students were impressively focused. They represented three time zones with some logging in at 5 a.m. their time. Questions flowed freely. Students helped each other by sharing content-enhancing experiences and following up with offline emails—something not as common with classroom settings.

It was thrilling how the group bonded. Even more impressive, everyone passed the capstone exam. Hooray! Yet again, the delineation between being the teacher and the student is obscured. We all learn from one another. ✪

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Our daily lives have drastically changed but that does not mean business stops. Experts believe that social distancing is here to stay, possibly for as long as a couple of years. According to a group of disease specialists from the Harvard T.H. Chad School of Public Health, "…some form of intermittent social distancing may need to be in place until 2022" due to a strong likelihood of future outbreaks occurring as lockdowns are lifted.

As the impact of COVID-19 continues to shake up our industry, right of way acquisition agents and relocation consultants have been creating alternative ways to continue providing essential services for public and private agency clients and tenants while maintaining the required social distancing rules enforced by the CDC.

Like all of our fellow right of way professionals, OPC agents have been developing solutions to maintain operations with minimal interruptions despite the pandemic.

SOCIAL DISTANCING SOLUTIONS

For right of way agents and relocation consultants

BY TODD SALVATORE, MAGGIE HARRY, SEAN KERR, TOMEK KAWKA AND MARIA BRIEF

Staying Connected While Maintaining Social Distancing

As essential services providers, we know that many housing and infrastructure projects must move forward despite challenging circumstances related to the COVID-19 pandemic. Having a project collaboration tool like OPC's SharePoint® platform (which provides client access to case files in a centralized and organized portal) is vital to maintain ongoing operations with little to no interruptions.

Instead of physically meeting with clients or tenants, most communication can now be done via video conference, email, telephone and certified mail. With the popularity of smartphones and conferencing apps, relocation agents, clients and tenants have the technological means to conduct business remotely, giving them a head start adjusting to this new way of doing business. For OPC, we have found that these forms of communication have been well received by both clients and tenants on OPC's current relocation projects and it has enabled most business to remain uninterrupted.

Tips and Considerations

If a company is looking to invest in better IT infrastructure to accommodate remote workforce, OPC's IT Director has a few suggestions:

- Look into remote access systems from big players, such as Microsoft, Citrix, Cisco and VMware.
- Use virtualization for better systems scalability.
- Use cloud-based collaboration technologies such as Office 365 SharePoint, Skype for Business, Microsoft Teams and Zoom.
- Improving security is essential as working remotely comes the added exposure to attacks and vulnerabilities. Companies like KnowBe4, an automated security awareness program, provides staff training on ways to protect the company data from cyberattacks.

Further Challenges

Many of the tenants who are being relocated are homeless, low-income, elderly or disabled persons who may not have smartphones or communication apps. The needs of our most vulnerable communities must be met as a matter of public service. To that end, many relocation agents need to continue essential fieldwork while taking defined company measures to ensure their health and safety as well as the health and safety of those in the community. Relocation agents should be equipped with their own personal protective equipment (PPE) and clear guidelines for on-site visits and other personal interactions.

Case Studies

Case Study 1: A rundown motel in a major West Coast metropolis has been a popular place for squatters to live. The City has purchased the motel and has contracted OPC to relocate the squatters, who will be receiving relocation benefits to move out of the motel. Due to the concern that they are unable to maintain proper social distancing, the City is taking immediate action and moving the tenants to another hotel during the pandemic.

Solution 1: OPC's agent has been going to the motel every day to deliver notices to the tenants/squatters face-to-face. Wearing a mask, carrying wipes and providing hand sanitizer for himself and the tenants, he takes extra precautions by speaking to the tenants through the door of their room and requesting them to go down to the lobby, which provides enough room for safe social distancing in order to provide notices and relocation checks. It is important to maintain excellent service while social distancing. OPC's relocation agents and project managers provide tenants with "hands on" assistance during the pre-move efforts and on move-day.

Case Study 2: As a result of the Covid-19 pandemic and social distancing requirements, our agents need to rely now on more tenant participation and less agent participation.

Solution 2: OPC created a Pre-Pack and Move Day Instructions guide, which provides the tenants with a breakdown of the necessary tasks needed to complete prior to move day and on move day. The guide provides step by step instructions for them to follow before move day and important safety information to implement during move day. The guide has been accepted by the client and will be circulated to all OPC agents to implement with their clients/tenants.

Case Study 3: With project schedules to maintain and social distancing rules to follow, right of way professionals must find creative ways to get documents signed and notarized.

Solution 3: Given the agent and the tenants have met multiple times previously, OPC agents decided to do a curbside notary signing. The agent put the document in the tenant's mailbox and waited outside in her car while the tenant read and signed the document in the comfort of their own home. When the tenant was done, they put the signed document in the mailbox along with their driver's license. The agent reviewed the document and completed the notary log in the safety of her own car. ✪

__Todd Salvatore__ is a Senior Project Manager overseeing acquisition and relocation projects for OPC. He is the current IRWA Chapter 44 President. __Maggie Harry__ is a Relocation Project Manager in OPC's Oakland office, and __Sean Kerr__ is a Senior Agent in OPC's Portland office. __Tomek Kawka__ is OPC's IT Director and __Maria Brief__ is OPC's Marketing Manager.

DISASTER-RESPONSE PLAYBOOK

Looking to the past to prepare for the future

BY TAYLOR DOYLE

It has been called catastrophic and a once-in-a-century event. Citizens wonder if their community will ever recover as the death toll climbs. You would be forgiven for thinking that this is about the COVID-19 pandemic, but this event occurred over 15 years ago.

On August 29, 2005, Hurricane Katrina ripped through the Gulf Coast causing billions of dollars in damage and a death toll unlike anything in recent memory. Doyle Land Services, Inc., which is based in New Orleans, LA, was forced to evacuate its employees before the storm hit and remained in Houston, TX while the city was underwater. We will never forget the horror of that time: the fear, the uncertainty, the pain. Despite this, I never imagined how well it would have prepared us for what would happen 15 years later during a worldwide pandemic.

Lessons Learned

Hurricane Katrina taught us lessons in leadership, organization and the value of preparedness. We emerged from that period as a stronger company because we were creative in our response and open to the changes that it brought. While in Houston, we expanded our marketing efforts and made new friends. Our internal staff received "battlefield promotions" and expanded their roles. We began focusing greater attention on developing our proprietary Land Management Data System and migrating

towards a cloud-based file storage system. (After you have to venture into a disaster recovery zone to rescue file boxes, it really changes your perspective on the importance of "the cloud"). Most importantly, we developed safety plans and preparedness tactics for the next hurricane or natural disaster that should arise.

While we never envisioned a pandemic in our safety planning, we have still followed the blueprints of our disaster preparedness plans. During the COVID-19 pandemic, our goals have been to maintain the safety of our employees, serve our clients and keep people employed to the best of our ability. In terms of office and health safety, we take our cues from the Center for Disease Control's website, particularly the section on Workplace Safety. As to keeping people employed and serving our clients, we've focused on three things:

1. Analyzing emergency regulations to find ways to better serve our clients.

2. Improving our remote work technologies and data system ease of use.

3. Keeping people employed by creating a flexible workforce that can handle new roles and responsibilities.

First, both state and federal governments have issued a litany of ordinances and laws to address the needs of our communities. For our industry, a major development is the widespread adoption of remote online notarizations. Remote online notarization allows landowners to notarize agreements remotely through a web-based application (think Zoom, but with a signature tool). For example, the notary video conferences with the landowner and the landowner then signs using an electronic signature system. The majority of states either already allow a form of remote online notarization or issued emergency declarations to temporarily allow it. We've already found that this tool is invaluable even beyond the pandemic as it can be used with landowners in other parts of the country/world or landowners who are looking to save time and travel to get documents notarized. As the situation changes with COVID-19, states and counties are updating and changing their policies in regard to remote online notarization. Check in regularly with your State Notary office or County Clerk of Court for status updates.

Secondly, Doyle has successfully created a remote communication system by leveraging our proprietary Land Management Data System and third-party tools such as Google Docs and Webex. Doyle Land Services, Inc., like many right of way firms, was already a remote company with teams operating all across the country. Our Data system is entirely web-based with reporting and internal file storage capabilities. During the past several months, we've rebuilt aspects of the system to make our mapping system more dynamic and user friendly, serving as a digital meeting place for our project leaders. The third-party systems have been welcome upgrades to collaborating with our field agents and for field teams communicating with landowners. We've been using document collaboration with Google Docs, Screen-sharing with Webex and our file-sharing system, Egnyte. Our adoption of these tools has already saved us time, allowed us to achieve faster results, and in turn has saved our clients' money and gets faster results.

Further, in an effort to stay connected and keep momentum, we require that each team lead (from Company President to Data Document Supervisors) speak with each of their direct reports every single work day and minimally ask the three basic questions: What are you working on today and what do you hope to accomplish? What are your plans for tomorrow and the days soon following, including goals or deadlines? Is there anything I can do to help? All the communication systems in the world won't suffice if we're not asking the right questions.

Finally, we're reinforcing a flexible workforce by cross-training team members so that they can handle the ongoing set of challenges and obstacles our client's face. A stable company needs employees that can step in and out of projects when needed. This allows us to avoid having to release and rehire, an issue so common in our industry. We're doing this with more database training for non-datadocs, more file preparation by right of way agents and more involvement from internal staff in the day-to-day activities of field projects.

In Summary

Although Hurricane Katrina and the COVID-19 Pandemic are very different circumstances, the playbook for response is shockingly similar: take care of the health of your employees, figure out how to communicate effectively, be flexible in your roles and find a way to turn this to your advantage. This last lesson is essential. Disaster will strike—whether it be plague, storm or economic downturn—but there is always opportunity in change and ways to rethink what you've been doing. Disasters pick us apart, but we have control of how we put ourselves back together. ✪

Taylor Doyle *is the General Counsel of Doyle Land Services, Inc. and is also in charge of Pandemic Response and Remote Technology Communications. Taylor is currently focused on Risk Management, Regulatory Compliance and reviewing Pandemic Legislation.*

SOUND TRANSIT REAL PROPERTY

Adapting to change during a global pandemic

BY JOSEPH GRAY

As creatures of habit, changing processes and established business practices is uncomfortable for most people. However, we have seen that the implementation of good tools, software and applications can be derailed when there isn't a corresponding paradigm shift in approach, attitude and culture. Organizations that have had massive growth in a short period of time, diverse workforces and challenging projects face these struggles every day.

As an agency that builds and operates regional transit service in western Washington, Sound Transit employs a broad and diverse workforce. The Sound Transit Real Property team is made up of direct staff and consultants who all have varying levels of experience with technology and the remote work environment. Sound Transit Real Property has existing policies in place and offers applications, tools and equipment for their employees to successfully work from home, but March 2020 raised the question of whether or not employees were actually prepared for the transition.

Although technology is ingrained in nearly every aspect of our daily lives, working from home (also known as WFH) is a new concept for millions. The transition to full-time work from home can be challenging for many people—even when it's planned. The COVID-19 global pandemic led Sound Transit Real Property to act quickly to protect the workforce by asking all staff to immediately begin working from home whenever possible. This unexpected and abrupt transition presented new opportunities and a seemingly ever growing list of challenges. A short list of these challenges include ensuring that all staff have the appropriate hardware and equipment needed to work remotely, training the team on using systems remotely, reviewing and updating remote work policies, ensuring staff's access to the internet at home, as well as other elements that would typically be sorted out after months or even years of planning and preparation.

A Fortunate Head Start

Fortuitously, the Sound Transit Real Property team had already begun procuring, configuring and implementing a new right of way software solution before COVID-19 hit the world. While going through the procurement process for the new Real Property software solution, the team began to analyze how it does business and look for opportunities to transition into more advanced and dynamic solutions. While the team was greatly anticipating the new right of way software solution, they also began implementing interim changes to the workflow, moving from existing, paper-centric and decentralized processes to a more efficient and technology-based process using existing applications. With these interim changes, the team began to gain greater visibility, accountability, collaboration and consistency. The changes that had begun before COVID-19 were instrumental in helping

the workforce transition to the remote work environment and also segued into identifying what the Real Property group needed out of the new software solution.

While this was a great start, COVID-19 has caused Sound Transit Real Property to accelerate the transition of manual systems to technology-based systems, while also refocusing and reprioritizing planning and implementation efforts for the new software. The team realized that the crux of a successful implementation of the new software solution is not just about the software, but is also dependent on the human element and the critical integration of the two. Within the first week of sending the majority of the workforce home, gaps and challenges in the team's ability to work effectively from home emerged. Recognizing the challenges the team was facing, the management team worked to identify and understand each team member's technical abilities, their familiarity of virtual collaboration and communication, as well as their role(s) while working remotely. They also considered the effect of preparing for the transition to new software and applications while also implementing new remote work protocols.

Unavoidable Challenges

One of the biggest challenges was making sure that each member of the team had the equipment needed to work effectively from home, such as laptop computers. It also became apparent that some team members were unfamiliar with how to access internal networks and communication applications from outside of the office. Along with all of this, most of the team did not already have a home office, multiple screens, high speed internet, or even a quiet area away from family, animals, roommates and other distractions. All of these challenges can cause new remote workers to struggle to stay productive and engaged.

To help the team respond to these challenges, Sound Transit Real Property was able to utilize available resources within the organization. The agency established an internal page for staff that focused on COVID-19 updates and also provided a wealth of resources and guides to help staff. To facilitate the team's understanding of the resources available to them, the Sound Transit Real Property team developed and conducted trainings with staff on current systems and applications, protocols and etiquette for virtual meetings, and the utilization of other applications to provide support such as conference call and screen share technology.

A New Software System

After addressing the immediate needs of team members, Sound Transit Real Property focused on evaluating the work that was typically conducted in-person to determine what work could be modified for the new remote work environment. While some activities still require some

face-to-face interactions, the team quickly developed and implemented a new system for routing acquisition and relocation packages for electronic approvals and signatures. This new system has been so successful that the team anticipates continuing to use this process after the return to worksite is authorized. The state of Washington is also helping with the transition to more remote work. In 2019, the State passed a remote online notarization bill. When it became apparent that COVID-19 was not leaving the United States any time soon, an emergency authorization was enacted in Washington. Sound Transit Real Property is working with the notaries on our team to make sure that we can take advantage of the new e-notary services. All of this ultimately contributed to the ongoing design and implementation of the Real Property software solution, including the development of workflows and refinement of forms that will be produced by the software.

One upside to the team working from home is that it has presented people with the opportunity and time to provide meaningful input into what is required in the new software system in order for them to be successful in their job. Simple things were identified such as: tracking processes, coordination, workflows, review processes, approval requirements, regulatory requirements, adherence to agency policy, and providing multiple levels of reporting across disciplines and the organization. It also provided the chance to identify the unique elements of collaboration within the Real Property functional group. All of this was done with the goal of maintaining continuity to keep projects moving.

Looking Forward

As development of the new software solution continues, the work from home environment has helped identify, clarify and highlight opportunities that are being integrated into the software solution, including:

- Making the most efficient use of resources and eliminating redundancy in processes
- Creating consistency within Real Property and across the agency
- Ensuring consistency for internal and external stakeholders across all agency projects
- Breaking down silos and allowing for cross-group/discipline collaboration and training
- Reducing risk associated with acquisition and relocation
- Meeting federal, state and agency regulations, policies and requirements
- Real-time information sharing and accessibility
- Centralized information storage and backup systems to ensure nothing is lost
- Reducing duplication of work
- Balancing workloads
- Managing the team and more accurate and consistent reporting
- Improving workflows and task delegation

The remote work environment will continue to inform our thinking as the team begins to develop training tools for the new software solution. A detailed training guide and short videos will help the team make another transition this fall when the software is rolled out to the larger team. Ultimately, the Sound Transit Real Property team looks forward to a new software system that supports a dynamic work force, both when they are working on-site and remotely.

In Summary

Sound Transit Real Property is committed to delivering the highest quality and most efficient real property services to enhance communities through transportation improvements. This is achieved by providing exceptional customer service and fair, equitable treatment to all stakeholders as we support delivery of the agency's projects and overall program. The objective with Sound Transit Acquisition and Relocation Software "STARS" is to do just that: provide the highest level of service that the residents, tourists and visitors of our state deserve. Sound Transits Real Property management is leading the charge to ensure that the original objective of a holistic right of way solution is maintained while seizing the opportunity to transition the workforce into a "work from anywhere" team. Regardless of current and future challenges that we may face, Sound Transit is determined to make sure that STARS provides their workforce the opportunity to continue to work and serve the people who rely on the transportation projects we deliver. ✪

Joseph Gray is the Director of Real Property, Sound Transit. He has 36 years of experience in the Right of Way Field.

SPECTATORS OR INNOVATORS?

The benefits of teamwork and proactive efforts

BY GLENN WINFREE, SR/WA

Recently, a small group of Chapter 31 members began discussing how the members and the Chapter might be impacted by the COVID-19 virus, related economic factors and the government mandated shutdown.

We quickly agreed that: (a) the Chapter would almost certainly have important challenges to face and (b) the issues of leadership, membership and education were going to be critical aspects of the challenges, as well as any solutions.

We essentially began as an ad hoc discussion group and, soon thereafter, we formed a Strategic Planning Group (SPG) with the blessing of our Executive Leadership team. We decided to organize our effort differently than the typical committee setup.

Effective Teamwork

First, we function without a Chair position. The SPG members all serve equally. We each offer topics for discussion and we each take a lead role on different issues and projects undertaken. The choice was made to function in a strictly advisory capacity in which we discuss issues, carry out research and then offer our suggestions to the Chapter's Leadership team for review and execution, as they deem appropriate.

The group is comprised of the following members:

- **Julie McDonald, PLS, PE, RWP** (Past Chapter 31 President, past Chair of the International Survey & Engineering Committee)
- **Steve Chastain, SR/WA** (Incoming Chapter 31 President)
- **Anthony Alderman, MRICS** (Past Chapter 31 President, International Director, Region 6 Treasurer/Secretary)
- **Glenn Winfree, SR/WA** (Past Chair of International Electric & Utilities Committee, past Vice Chair of International Relations Group, current Chair of Chapter 31 Utilities Committee)

The long-range planning focus of the group's efforts can be summarized as helping secure a more successful future for our Chapter and its members. Chapter 31 has a long history of active and engaged leaders who have risen to address whatever challenges the Chapter has encountered. We feel our new SPG effort will itself be a good developmental process and ongoing resource for the Chapter's leaders and other members. It is our hope and intention that these efforts benefit our Chapter and the Association not only during the pandemic time frame, but also for many years into the future.

Brainstorming Solutions

The challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic and the related governmental shutdown issues, as well as the resulting economic impacts (that will unavoidably continue to unfold for some time), have presented us with some new and interesting challenges to address. As our group began discussing our concerns about those issues, it was readily apparent that our members and their employers were already experiencing negative impacts.

So instead of simply standing by during these challenging times and waiting for the impacts to unfold, we made a choice to be pro-active. We identified the three primary issues of leadership, membership and education to focus on initially. The leadership aspect was identified as the most critical, based on our understanding that the other two issues can only be effectively addressed if we have leadership that is informed and actively engaged (As a note of explanation, leadership is referring to both the individual members serving as leaders, as well as the concept of leadership demonstrated when one sets examples for others to follow).

Our thinking at this point is to initiate discussions with our leaders about how we might best benefit from improving what is already a very good level of leadership within the Chapter. We plan to then take those discussions back within the SPG, possibly reach out to other engaged IRWA leaders (from whatever part of the world they live) and evaluate specific ways that we can improve our situation. One current expectation resulting from these efforts will be an increased level of engagement and energy by both our leaders and the general membership. This one effect may end up being the single most important outcome of our efforts, as it would bring the Chapter new ongoing sources of great ideas and member involvement.

The second area of focus for our new SPG is membership – not only how to maintain our current roster of members, but how we might use the current stresses and strains in the industry to actually grow our Chapter. We will initially invite our Membership Committee Chair to join in our efforts to look deeply at such topics as:

- Who our members are (…and are not)
- How they benefit from IRWA membership and participation
- The impacts of industry trends on membership maintenance and growth

Chapter 31 Carolinas spans two entire states, so we will also be considering other issues such as those related to the limits of travel for members and in particular, for DOT members restricted from travel across state lines and how we might still bring those members the value and opportunities of being more involved.

Education, the third area of focus, is one that we feel everyone in the Association already values and understands. We easily identified some of the education related challenges that are already being encountered by the members and will be working with our Education Committee Chair to:

- Benefit from the Chair's insights and experience
- Look at the online education changes now underway by the Association
- Investigate the needs of employers in the changing environment of the industry
- Understand the important and changing money-related issues

Obviously, these are all critical issues for any Chapter during normal times, but we feel that in times of stress, the members have even more need of education and the other benefits that the Chapter can offer (i.e. networking, leadership development opportunities, etc.). We also believe that current challenges and needs emphasize the importance of the IRWA—especially the local Chapters—to both the individual members and to their employers.

Membership Growth

An important role of Chapter leadership is to set the standard for engagement by the Chapter's other members. A Chapter's leadership unquestionably needs to take the lead role in these type situations and provide that critical effort. We also believe that it is part of that same leadership role to encourage member participation in the education process, as well as to assist the Chapter in both maintaining and growing its membership.

The members should benefit from these efforts in several ways. They will benefit directly from the actions taken by the Chapter's leaders and their own individual involvement, and indirectly by virtue of the leadership examples being offered by other Chapter members.

These benefits should be of particular value to members who find themselves furloughed or laid off as they begin their search to secure new (and maybe even better) opportunities. And just like individual members, the overall industry and its employers will also be trying to adjust to these new challenges. We will be discussing these issues and how to best ensure that employers understand the benefits involved as their employees bring increased education and innovative ideas back to the job. From an employer's perspective, this becomes more critical as staffing is reduced or as a contractor-based business model is adopted.

In Summary

Current events are presenting us all with great challenges, both individually and as Chapters. Do we standby as spectators and simply watch events unfold? Or do we use the opportunity to innovate and make the proverbial lemonade from lemons?

Well, for our part, we say that the Chapter 31 Lemonade Stand is now open for business! ✪

Glenn Winfree, SR/WA has over 30 years of land rights related experience in infrastructure real estate (Duke Energy), brokerage, and commercial real estate. He is currently a member of Right of Way Magazine's Editorial Board of Advisors, a member of IEUC, and Chair of Carolinas Chapter 31 Utility Committee. He is a past Chair of IEUC, as well as Vice Chair of the International Relations Group.

To magazine@irwaonline.org

Subject Our story: Persevering Through a Global Pandemic

During these challenging times, Buckeye Partners and our IT department were quick to transition the entire team over to working remotely. They have kept us informed about the events of Covid-19, which are discussed on a weekly basis. Safety First. Business as usual. Buckeye management cares about their asset (their employees) and I am very grateful to work for a company that has stood by us during these times.

Working remotely has been challenging. The grandbaby crying in the background and my Doxie, Rugar, barking during conference calls. And then there's wireless kicking us off the internet. We have over-come these difficulties and manage to get the job done.

Hats off to an amazing team and company.

-Cathy (Kate) Briggs

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Subject Our story: Persevering Through a Global Pandemic

Volkert performs right of way services for DOT, energy and local agency clients. While Volkert developed its own response, generally, each of these clients sent their own instructions for us to comply with. Our strategy was to evaluate each and to implement the approach that was most conservative and safety-oriented.

Our right of way agents have long used electronic means of communication to disseminate information, negotiate and exchange documents securely. Like so many, we found ourselves doing significantly more video conferencing, in addition to the email and phone calls we exchange with property owners and agencies. The sticky point was notarization, which traditionally has had to be done in person. Quite reasonably, people with health issues and general apprehension about meeting in person could do everything up to the notary, and then we would be stopped.

It was lucky for our Indiana group that the state had already been planning to roll out remote notary. As soon as the state's licensing agency approved instructional vendors, Volkert's Indiana Agents took the educational courses and submitted applications to be certified as remote notaries. This was achieved by Chad Roots, RWP; Greg Hoyes, RWA; Shelby Hutson, RWA; and Mike Kole, RWA.

Having this new tool is helping to overcome apprehensions and get out work completed in a timely fashion. This certainly makes our clients happy and is keeping everyone involved safe.

Thanks!
Mike Kole, RWA

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We invite you to continue sharing your inspiring stories with Right of Way Magazine by emailing **navales@irwaonline.org.**