BUILDING AN INNOVATIVE PARTNERSHIP

An interview with HDR's Eric Keen and OPPD's Timothy Burke

BY ETHEL NAVALES

As IRWA continues its higher purpose of improving the quality of people's lives through infrastructure development, we recognize that the heart and strength of this Association lies with our members and the companies who support them. Two such companies are **HDR**, an employee-owned firm specializing in engineering, architecture, environmental and construction services, as well as **Omaha Public Power District (OPPD)**, a public electric utility in the state of Nebraska.

With both companies headquartered in Omaha, it's no surprise that HDR and OPPD have been collaborating on projects since the 1950s. It's also no surprise that with such similar work ethic and goals, this partnership has only grown stronger over the years. By working together, OPPD and HDR have experienced success with a number of notable right of way projects, including the Midwest Transmission Project.

We were given the opportunity to speak with HDR's Chairman and CEO, **Eric L. Keen**, as well as OPPD's President and CEO, **Timothy J. Burke**. Together, these inspiring leaders open up about their industry expertise and the importance of healthy partnerships. Their experience working with one another shows us how a strong collaboration can truly work to help any company reach its end goals.

Tell us about your professional career and how you ended up as CEO of your company.

Timothy Burke: I first got involved in right of way work at OPPD in the siting of transmission lines and substations. I was involved in redefining the OPPD stakeholder process, where we utilized the expertise of HDR in finding the best practices in right of way acquisition and stakeholder processes. I had been a vice president with OPPD for approximately 18 years before I became the President and CEO.

My role changed over those first 18 years by having accountability over customer service, transmission and distribution, regulatory and governmental affairs, corporate communications and human resources. I believe that my experiences in these areas of the organization prepared me for the role of President and CEO.

Eric Keen: I started my career as a bridge engineer and eventually managed complex projects for our clients. My career progressed from managing projects, to offices, to many other parts of our business. This provided me with the experience to become CEO.

Throughout my career, I've learned the importance of building talented teams of professionals who are aligned with our clients and our communities–such teams provide impactful projects. The importance of teams and partnering with clients to deliver great work is what our business is all about.

Describe what your company does, as well as your company's goals.

Eric: HDR provides world-class consulting services that have a profound impact on people's lives. While we are most well-known for adding beauty and structure to communities through high-performance buildings and smart infrastructure, we provide much more than that. We create an unshakable foundation for progress because our multidisciplinary teams also include scientists, economists, builders, analysts and artists.

We are entering our second century of business, serving clients from more than 225 offices around the world, with active projects in more than 40 countries. HDR's Real Estate and Right

of Way group has grown to nearly 200 real estate and right of way professionals throughout North America who specialize in infrastructure, renewable and energy corridor projects.

Our vision for the future is to continue our philosophy as an employee-owned company: to bring talent into the HDR family around the world. In the past 20 years, we have acquired more than 60 companies and with it, unrivaled talent in transportation, architecture, power and energy, water, federal, construction engineering and inspection staff, as well as scientists tackling whatever challenges lie before us.

Timothy: Nebraska is the only state in the nation served solely by publicly owned utilities, such as municipal utilities, electric cooperatives and public power districts. As a public electric utility operating since 1946, OPPD has undergone transformation in recent years. This includes adding renewable energy resources, creating a strong environment for economic development, spurring innovation and implementing cost-saving practices.

For over 100 years, OPPD has provided benefits such as local control (Nebraska utilities are overseen by publically elected boards, appointed utility boards, rural cooperatives and city councils), reliability and affordability.

OPPD's vision is to lead the way we power the future, and to do that through our mission of providing affordable, reliable and environmentally sensitive energy services to our customer-owners. OPPD is currently providing 40 percent of its retail energy from renewable resources and that will be increasing in future years. OPPD also has electric rates that are below the regional and national averages with top quartile reliability.

What are your priorities as CEO and what are some key reasons you wanted to take on this responsibility?

Eric: My focus is on helping our employees deliver great services to our clients that impact our communities, and to continue to build the foundation for our employee-owned company. I took on the role of CEO because I knew it meant working with great people as part of a very unique employee-owned company. My aim is to help pass on this opportunity to our next generation of employee-owners.

Timothy: I took on the role of CEO because I really wanted to make a difference in changing the manner in which our company provided and delivered our electric service to our customer-owners and elevate our role in

the communities we serve. As for our priorities, the OPPD Board of Directors and Senior Management have developed 15 Strategic Directives that drive OPPD's priorities and focus.

What is it about this work that you feel passionate about?

Timothy: My passion lives in OPPD's core values, which focus on our desire to serve, our honor for our communities and the mindset to care for each other. I know that we have a job to do to make sure that our power is as reliable as it can be, but we also want to make sure that we treat our customer-owners as partners in the process. We must continue to provide education, get their input and find "win wins" for everyone involved.

Eric: Similar to Tim, my passion also aligns with my company's core values. Right of way acquisition and utility relocations are two of the most challenging aspects affecting project delivery for our clients. We are able to provide early consulting services that help clients deliver their projects more cost effectively and often in shorter timeframes.

When and how did the partnership between OPPD and HDR begin?

Eric: HDR was involved in a partnership with Gibbs-Hill (GHDR) for the design of large OPPD generating plants in the 1950s and 1970s (North Omaha Station, Fort Calhoun Nuclear Station and Nebraska City Station Unit 1). After those large projects, HDR continued to serve OPPD on small project assignments through the 1970s and 1980s. Starting in the early 1990s, HDR's involvement with OPPD really started to grow. HDR began serving as OPPD's Owner's Engineer on its large power generation projects, specifically OPPD's last six generating units (Sarpy County Station Unit 3, Sarpy County Station Units 4 and 5, Cass County Station Units 1 and 2, and Nebraska City Station Unit 2). Recently, HDR has served OPPD on large power delivery projects like the Midwest Transmission Project and Elkhorn River Valley. Over the last 25 years, HDR has served OPPD on all types of projects in all types of market conditions.

Timothy: As you can see from those examples, OPPD and HDR have had a long tenure of relationship and partnership and have worked on projects ranging from generation, transmission and distribution to environmental projects, as well as recreating our stakeholder outreach process. Since we are headquartered locally, our collaboration benefits the local communities we serve.

Can you recall a particularly memorable project that HDR and OPPD collaborated on? Please describe.

Timothy: There are a couple of projects that stand out for me. The first is the transmission line from OPPD's Nebraska City plant to the City of Lincoln, Nebraska. It was the largest transmission project OPPD has undertaken in over 10 years.

The other project that comes to mind was a substation siting and respective transmission modification and siting to support increasing load in our growing Sarpy County region.

Both projects were very successful and finished within budget and on time. Most importantly, these projects utilized our newly recreated stakeholder process which resulted in few, if any, condemnations or customer concerns.

Eric: For me, the Midwest Transmission Project stands out. HDR provided several easement acquisition services for 157 parcels and a host of other right of way services related to this project. The 44.6 mile, 345 kV transmission line runs between Sibley, Missouri and Nebraska City, Nebraska. The project began as a partnership between Kansas City Power and Light in 2010. The line is an important part of the region's electrical system. It helps relieve congestion on the electric grid, enhances security and advances renewable energy in the region.

Following the routing and siting process, OPPD selected HDR to provide engineering, environmental, stakeholder and public engagement, right of way and construction services. The project energized on Dec. 13, 2016.

How has the partnership between HDR and OPPD helped your company in reaching its goals?

Eric: As employees, we understand that our responsibility is to provide great service to our clients. OPPD is a client that has helped us build a strong power practice over the years, and we are fortunate to continue to support them as their business needs change, as well. We understand we must support them to deliver reliable services for customers.

Timothy: Through this partnership, OPPD was provided with the best practices around the world in stakeholder engagement. In addition to assisting us on projects, HDR enlightened us on new ways of engaging customers and communities. Ultimately, they have assisted us in carrying out our vison, mission and core values.

What do you think are some of the biggest benefits of partnerships in general?

Eric: Collaboration and innovation are what defines the HDR culture, and we believe we are poised to make some of the most significant, positive changes our clients have ever experienced, both on a local scale and a large scale-basis. We work together to collaborate, to challenge the status quo and to challenge one another to improve and innovate on how to provide electrical services to our communities.

Timothy: The biggest benefit to me is that as we create project successes. We learn from each other, and each of us can improve in our own specific way. That is a sign of a great partnership.

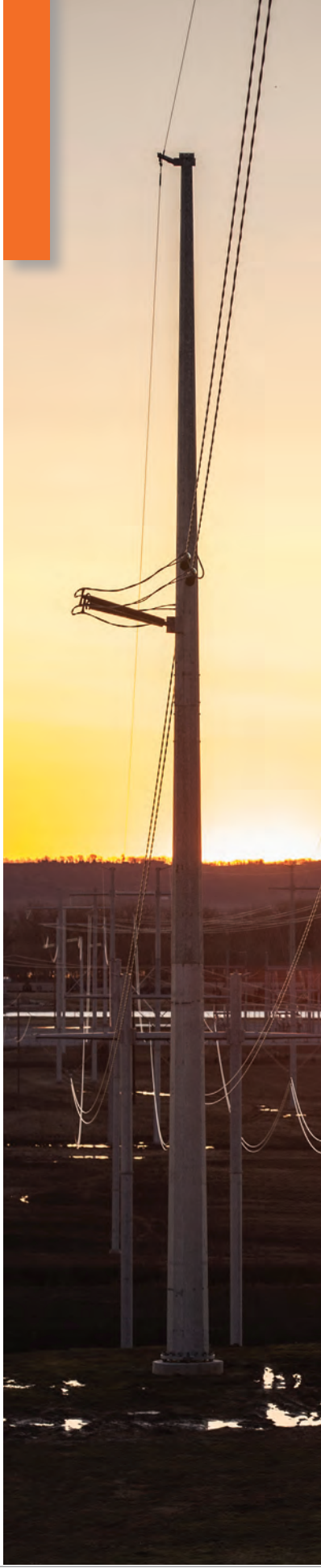
What can be done to improve these collaborations?

Timothy: I believe that both parties need to be open to learning and willing to change their status quo. We need to be committed to improve our strategic agility.

Eric: Additionally, technology continues to evolve both in how we generate power and also in how we deliver services. We see opportunities to bring experts to the table with different perspectives and expertise, all to improve our power grid to be more efficient and resilient.

What is your company's involvement with the IRWA?

Eric: HDR has been a longtime supporter of the IRWA. We were honored to be the host sponsor for the 2017 International Education



Conference in Anchorage, Alaska, and to be named the 2018 Employer of the Year for Companies with 20 or More Employees by the IRWA.

Our real estate and right of way professionals are proud members of the IRWA, many of which have obtained certifications and designations through IRWA's education and credentialing program. Our employees hold IRWA leadership positions at the local, regional and international levels and as technical experts regularly present on the latest right of way trends, tools and innovations affecting the industry today. In fact, one of our employees, Aimie Mims, currently serves as the IRWA's International President-Elect.

Timothy: OPPD has also been a longtime supporter of the IRWA. In fact, members of OPPD have been involved with the Association since nearly the inception of our company. We are a small group, but all of our employees are IRWA members.

Our staff members have been Chapter Presidents, Region Chairs and recipients of various IRWA awards. Jake Farrell is our company's first member who has been part of IRWA's International Executive Committee as the International Treasurer.

How has the IRWA helped your company reach its goals?

Eric: We believe the IRWA's purpose of improving people's lives through infrastructure development aligns well with HDR's guiding purpose of doing things right to make great things possible. Together we are enhancing community engagement to deepen our impact and better understand the people and places we serve.

The IRWA also supports our real estate and right of way professionals in mastering their craft through technical training and leadership development. This helps HDR to continue to develop subject matter experts and build high-performing project teams that thrive amid complexity in today's marketplace.

Timothy: We greatly value the education and credentialing opportunities that have been available to us thanks to IRWA. The Annual International Education Conference—as well as the different Chapter and Region events—present networking opportunities and a chance for OPPD to find reputable contractors and vendors.

Most importantly, IRWA gives OPPD the chance to stay updated with ethical standards and serves as a place for our staff to improve their leadership development.

Where would you like to see yourself in 10 years? What about your company?

Eric: I hope to be reading about the continued success of HDR and OPPD as they continue to build on the partnership and discover new ways to deliver power to our communities.

Timothy: In 10 years, I still want to be challenging my strategic agility, shaping the direction of our company, building partnerships and delivering our commitment to our vision, mission and core values. Organizationally, leading the way means consistently changing and performing on new mindsets and ideals of our customer-owners. OPPD will deliver on that promise.

What advice do you have for someone entering the right of way profession?

Timothy: Always think about the customer or owner of the property, but be clear in sharing why, what and how. Connect with the property owners personally. Finally, show empathy and demonstrate care to and for the individual and property impacted.

Eric: It is a great profession. Continue to be inquisitive about how technology is changing our business, and how you can embrace it to be a leader and not a follower. ✪