



## AN INTERVIEW WITH IRWA'S YOUNG PROFESSIONAL OF THE YEAR **DERRICK ROMA, SR/WA**

### What did it mean to you to walk across that stage to receive your award?

It was motivating! There was a lot of energy in the room and it felt very rewarding to receive the recognition. More importantly, it has given me an opportunity to thank the many people who have helped me to find my way in the early part my career. I felt like I was accepting the award on behalf of so many others, especially my wife Suzanne, who has been so supportive of my dedication to work and my involvement with the IRWA. Without her and all of my mentors at O. R. Colan Associates and throughout the IRWA, I would never be where I am today. Thank you, everyone!

### What advice would you give to someone who is in the early stages of their career with IRWA and is looking for the next step?

Expand your skillset and get out of your comfort zone. The best things in life lie on the other side of fear. Look around you and at the people that you deem to be successful. Seek their advice, establish goals and develop a plan to achieve them. Take advantage of every opportunity to be mentored, but also to mentor others. You will be amazed at how much you will learn and how good it feels when you give back.

## How does Derrick embody the YPG of the year?

He truly leads by example. Derrick is willing to flip the coin over to explore the other side. He is not only open to those new ideas, he is not afraid to implement them regardless of success or failure.

—**Carmelita Delgado (past YPG Chair)**

He has a willingness to continuously go above and beyond not only in his professional career, but for the IRWA and the Young Professional Group.

—**Noelle Hoelsken (YPG Secretary)**

Derrick embodies the YPG of the year because of his commitment to his career and the organization.

—**Matt Eckman (YPG Vice Chair)**

He has the ability to motivate, educate and provide directional purpose within our group. He balances career and family effortlessly. He is always willing to lend a hand, an ear, an idea. He joins the ranks of successful YPG winners, but I believe this will not be his only award received from IRWA. Congratulations and I can't wait to see what you do next!

—**Nikkiy Bestgen (YPG Chair)**



### What was your most favorite part of the IRWA Conference in Edmonton?

The networking event organized by the Young Professionals was a highlight for me. The whole young professional group put in a lot of effort throughout the year to pull that event together, and it was a huge success. It was great to see everyone coming together, enjoying the fellowship and sharing perspective.

### What has your right of way career meant to you?

This career has allowed me to play a role in building and maintaining our nation's infrastructure and has been very fulfilling. No acquisition, relocation, or project is the same, and they often present difficult and emotional situations for property owners and displacees. When recommending relocation benefits or settlements, it can be challenging to ensure that compensation is just for the property owner or displacee, and is also justifiable to the client or tax payers that are funding the project. Acquisitions and relocations can be very complex and it is extremely rewarding to be part of the solutions to some of these challenging problems.

### If you could go back and tell yourself something 10 years ago, what would it be?

To get involved in IRWA leadership earlier in my career. I joined the organization immediately upon entering the right of way profession and I attended meetings, but I sat on the sideline while the same few dedicated individuals committed their time volunteering as Officers and Committee Chairs. I finally jumped in and my involvement with the organization has been much more rewarding ever since. Also, buy heaps of Netflix stock!

### How has IRWA affected your career?

The IRWA has really changed my perspective of the right of way industry, particularly after attending the regional events and national conferences, where I have learned how diverse the right of way industry is. It is easy to get sucked into projects and the everyday demands of the work, losing sight of the periphery. I have enjoyed attending these events and regaining sight of the bigger picture. It has helped me to maintain focus on long term goals and has also allowed me to give back to the organization through volunteer opportunities.



### If we could hold the IRWA Education Conference anywhere in the world, where would you choose?

I lived on the South Island of New Zealand for six months while studying abroad in college, and would certainly welcome any opportunity to go back and visit. It is a beautiful country. (Or Boston, Massachusetts!)

### What is your next step and how can leadership at IRWA support you?

From a professional development standpoint, I am working to earn my Certified General Appraiser's License, which has always been a goal of mine. Within IRWA, I am also exploring opportunities to volunteer at the regional and national level and to continue to represent the interests of the young professionals. IRWA can provide support by continuing to invite the young professionals to the table and to involve us in decision-making at the national level. The YPG will be the future of the organization, so it is important to understand the YP's perspective.

### Share a YPG memory that has impacted your life.

Being involved with the YPG leading up to the Anchorage, Alaska conference really changed my perspective on the organization. We were trying out some new ideas at the time, which were not always well received outside of our group. The YPG had some tremendous leadership though, and with support from HQ, we were able to all come together to produce some big results. It was empowering to have been associated with such a dedicated group and to see the sincere support for the young professionals coming from HQ.

### If you had to describe the YP group in one sentence what would it be?

A growing network of professionals, newer to the right of way industry, that are all looking for opportunities for personal and professional development, as well as ways to contribute toward the future of the IRWA.

### What can IRWA do in order to better support the young professionals within the organization and their career?

When I entered the right of way industry in 2006 after graduating college, I was assigned to work on a large airport land acquisition and relocation assistance program. On my desk the first day, next to my copy of the Uniform Act, was an application to join the IRWA. I understand now that I was extremely fortunate to have that level of support from my employer. We need to work toward a future that ensures other young professionals have that same opportunity to engage with the IRWA early in their career.

### What is your Purpose within IRWA?

My purpose is to play a small role in ensuring that the organization remains healthy into the future and continues to be the preferred organization for infrastructure real estate professionals. If you talk with anyone working in the right of way industry, their journey into the profession will usually involve a series of events, where the only common denominator seems to be happenstance. Mine has been no different, but when it comes to succession planning, luck is not a strategy. We need to be proactive and create dedicated career paths into the right of way industry and reach the next generation of students.

### Bonus Question: What is your favorite food?

Tacos. 🌮

