



Your Destiny is Calling

It's a matter of professional pride

BY JACK REEFER

During my Christmas break back in 1968, I took a Pennsylvania Civil Service test for a position called "Government Career Trainee." It was a very difficult exam, but I somehow managed to pass it. In March of 1969, I interviewed at several state offices in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, and wound up as a glorified clerk in the Right of Way Bureau of the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation, known at the time as the Pennsylvania Department of Highways.

When I splashed down in Harrisburg, I knew all of two people in the area. So out of necessity, I started connecting the dots socially and on the job. In 1971, I became a member of IRWA Pennsylvania Chapter 9. I went through the Chapter Office Chairs and served as President-Elect in 1980, President in 1981 and International Director in 1982-1983, followed by Region 4 Vice Chair, Chair and International Membership Committee Chair.

In the early 1980s, Walt Harmer at Philadelphia Electric was the Editor of our Chapter's award-winning newsletter. To help defray the cost of printing and mailing, Chapter members were invited to have their business cards published in the newsletter for \$10 per year, and mine was one of those cards. Walt asked me why someone working for PennDOT would willingly pay money for an ad when it wasn't going to generate more work or income like it might for an appraiser, attorney or title company. I told him, "I'm not going to ask any other member of this Chapter to do something that I won't."

I always had to pay my own membership dues, and most of the time my presence and participation in Chapter Meetings, Region Forums and the Annual International Education Conferences took place on my own time and my own dollar. Some of my coworkers couldn't understand why I did everything I could to become a better right of way professional for my employer when I had to use my own vacation time and financial resources. However, I looked at the time and money not as an expense, but as a worthwhile investment in myself and in my chosen profession.

Today, more employers are recognizing the benefits of having their staff involved in IRWA and are supporting their efforts by paying for membership dues and giving time off to attend chapter courses and events. But what happens if your employer isn't able or willing to provide this support? Members of this Association have been grappling with this dilemma for years. First, take the time to explain to your employer that membership and participation in IRWA will make you more valuable as an employee. Then, if your employer does not share your enthusiasm for membership, volunteerism and participation, don't sell yourself short. This is where professional pride and self-respect comes into play.

Step up and take control of your own professional destiny. You will only get out of your career what you put into it. You have to start somewhere. You have to start sometime. Make it here. Make it now. 🚀



A member of IRWA since 1971, Jack retired from the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation in 2008.