

SURVIVAL OF THE DETERMINED

Montana's Chapter 45 reflects on its 50th Anniversary



BY BERNARD LEA, SR/WA

The history of Montana Chapter 45 is a long one that includes some good times and some challenging ones. In the beginning, when the Association was known as the American Right of Way Association, there was substantial support from most of the public agencies in the state, including Montana Power and the Montana Department of Transportation. These companies believed in our mission and gave their support because they understood their agents needed expertise that could be provided by the Association. We discovered that there were members who really believed in the benefits of membership and sold it to their supervisors.

Unfortunately, this support dropped off over time, and we began to struggle. Without the support of their employer, many of our agency

members couldn't justify the expense of traveling to meetings or assuming a leadership position with the Chapter. As a result, many of us went through the elected chairs more than once to keep the Chapter alive.

The 80's were lean times for our Chapter. On more than one occasion, we didn't have enough members in attendance to actually hold a meeting. And without enough members, we didn't have a quorum to conduct business. Part of the reason for low attendance is because of the size of Montana. It is approximately 500 miles from Miles City in the eastern part of the state to Missoula, which is in the western half. Most members would need at least two days of travel and an overnight stay in order to attend a two-hour meeting. To address this, we would move the meetings around to give each member a chance to attend.

Despite the low Chapter participation, we never gave up! During one of my terms as Chapter President, I noticed several members continued to show an interest so we approached them to become more active by running for an office. Most accepted the challenge. We also began recruiting from the attendees at the courses we sponsored. Many of our more recent members and officers came from this recruitment strategy.

We are proud of our Chapter's ability to survive. The key is to not give up too soon. Chapter 45 was able to celebrate its 50th Anniversary because of the determination demonstrated by its members during the lean times. As long as there are interested and active members, even the smallest Chapter can survive. ★



Chapter 45 celebrated its 50th Anniversary in 2016 when it hosted the Region 7 Fall Forum. Pictured from left, Jerry Colburn, SR/WA, Chapter President Michael Rabb and IRWA's Daniel Stekol, who presented the commemorative banner.



Past Chapter Presidents include, from left, Pat Compton, Michael Rabb, Dee Oakland, David Whitlock, SR/WA, Rose Shea, R/W-EC, Betsy Tarrant, Bernard Lea, SR/WA and Gene Kammerman, SR/WA.