

Investing in My Future

Concentrating on job satisfaction and professional growth

BY ROXINNE A. MCPHAIL

I spent 20 years in the real estate industry before I heard of right of way or even knew that the profession existed. I had become a real estate agent and investor in 1995 and had varied experiences including selling foreclosure properties for Bank of America. I didn't realize it at the time, but the foreclosure experience—essentially negotiating to take property away from people who did not want to lose it—was good preparation for a career in right of way.



After obtaining my real estate broker's license in 2011, I made the decision to get back to my prairie roots and began looking for jobs outside the big city. I had been living in California and realized that city life wasn't for me. As I looked at jobs online, I came across a realty officer posting that involved negotiating right of way for road projects. As I read through the job description, I felt that this would be an interesting, challenging and fun career option. I applied for the job and after ten months of interviewing, salary negotiation and an intensive housing search, I found myself starting a new life in Bismarck, North Dakota.

Within a few months of working in right of way, I knew this career was a perfect fit. Ray Barchenger, SR/WA, my colleague and an active member of IRWA, encouraged me to take classes and become involved in Dakotas Chapter 72. My employer paid for a course called Negotiating with a Diverse Clientele in January 2013. The instructor, Faith

Roland, SR/WA, led some lively and relatable discussions, and I realized that I could learn a lot from taking more classes and pursuing IRWA's credentialing options. So I put together a course outline, cost estimate and timetable for achieving the SR/WA designation and formally presented it to my supervisor. It was met with encouragement and verbal approval.

New to bureaucracy, I was unfamiliar with the slow-moving approval and funding process. Even though it was heartily agreed that enhancing my negotiation skills and deepening my right of way knowledge was beneficial, the training opportunities seemed to be slipping away. My class requests suffered from delayed approvals and a deficient training budget. Then in December 2013, I received an email from IRWA offering discounts for online classes. This prompted me to take a second look at funding my own education. During my extensive real estate career, I was accustomed to paying for my continuing education and real estate designations. I had invested thousands of dollars in my education, so why rest on my laurels now? I needed to shift focus and concentrate on what would benefit my career and increase my job satisfaction, so I immediately signed up for three online classes, which I funded myself. Next, I became an IRWA member and filed my candidacy for the SR/WA designation.

To date, my employer and I have each paid about 50 percent toward my education costs. But having learned to navigate the halls of bureaucracy, I discovered some avenues to faster approval and less stringent budgets. My supervisor has since approved and funded several classroom-based courses in the coming year. In the end, I anticipate covering roughly 30 percent of my professional development cost, while my employer funds 70 percent. In the end, every cent I have spent has been completely worth it.

There is always something new to learn and negotiation skills to sharpen. I believe IRWA membership, education and designations are a key component to better job performance, as well as gaining respect from my peers and continually doing right by the landowners I meet. I am an enthusiastic newcomer to IRWA and look forward to what continued membership will bring. 🌟



Roxinne is a Right of Way Negotiator and Realty Officer in North Dakota and a candidate for the SR/WA designation and R/W-NAC certification.