WORTH ITS WEIGHT IN GOLD

My experience as Chapter Newsletter Editor

BY MARY LOU GAYLE, SR/WA

When the President-Elect of Chapter 52 first asked me to consider taking over the newsletter, I had no idea what I was getting myself into. But soon, I found myself in the middle of one of the best IRWA experiences I've ever had.

I started in real estate thanks to my father, who always had an interest in the field and encouraged me to become a realtor. While I found real estate work intriguing, it didn't take long for me to realize that being a realtor was not for me. I wasn't, however, quite ready to give up on real estate; I enjoyed working with mortgage companies and law offices to prepare real estate documents for closings. That became my focus for over 10 years.

My career in right of way work began when I accepted a position as legal secretary for the Virginia Beach City Attorney's Office. My job duties included drafting/revising agreements of sale and closing documents, as well as reviewing plats, title reports and appraisals for road projects. What an eye opener! I thought I knew real estate, but what I didn't know was right of way. I worked for the City Attorney's office for 18 years and then transferred to the City of Virginia Beach's Public Works Department–Real Estate Division in January of 2014. My new position as a Right of Way Agent prompted me to join the IRWA.

Stepping into the Association

Shortly after I joined the Real Estate Division, I was asked by Robin Brandeburg, SR/WA(my boss and Chapter 52's then President-Elect) to consider taking over the newsletter. I told her I would think about it, but I wasn't ready to commit. I had just started a new job and more importantly, I needed to find out more about the IRWA. I started going to the meetings within three weeks of joining the division. I met the most wonderful people at that first meeting and had a great time. It didn't hurt that the meeting was held in Charlottesville at Michie's Tavern, which boasts the best fried chicken in Virginia! My list of new acquaintances and contacts within the field began to grow.

After that first meeting, I was once again asked to take on the newsletter. I had edited newsletters at previous jobs and while I would not say that I jumped at the chance, I nervously agreed to give it a go. I needed some time to get acclimated to my new position in Public Works, so it was agreed that my stint would begin with the July edition. To prepare, I reviewed several copies of previous newsletters and began to brainstorm. I also attended Chapter meetings, general membership meetings and I even sat in on the board meetings to get a sense of what direction I wanted to take this newsletter.

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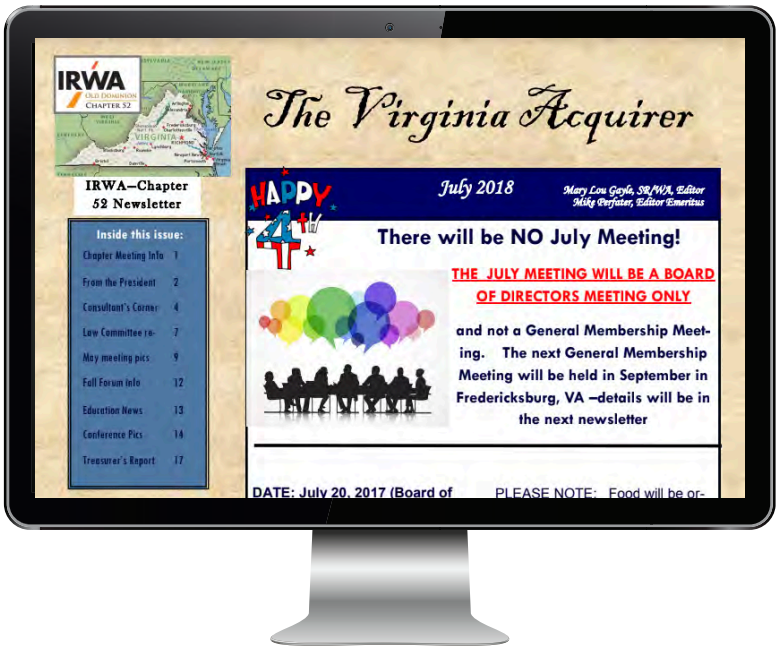

Creating a Vision

Chapter 52's Region encompasses the entire Commonwealth of Virginia. It is rich in our nation's history and is the birthplace to eight of our United States Presidents. I wanted that heritage to be incorporated somehow into our newsletter, The Virginia Acquirer.

I chose a dark parchment background for the newsletter to be reminiscent of the Declaration of Independence, and I also chose a font for our logo that looked like it was written with a quill pen. I sent these ideas to the Chapter officers and received immediate thumbs up. I added a monthly recipe and asked Phyllis Lilly, SR/WA, a stalwart of our Chapter and Region, for a copy of her famous barbecue recipe. She gladly gave it to me, along with an article on appraisal news! And just like that, I had the first feature article.

The Process

The first newsletter consisted of only four pages, but I quickly realized that this was the beginning of something big. Sure enough, the newsletter grew and matured. Plans for the next newsletter began immediately after the first one went out. Every board meeting presented an opportunity to solicit ideas, take pictures and enlist regular contributors.

In addition to the articles, I try to include some information from IRWA Headquarters, copies of our latest Treasurer's report, a word search with words taken from various IRWA classes (I pick a different class each month), credentialing and education information, conference and forum updates, as well as industry changes and news. The recipe of the month still appears and has resulted in taste tests at our Chapter meetings. The search for new ideas and features never ends. The newsletter must continue to evolve in order maintain interest from members.

I still start each newsletter a day or two after the previous newsletter goes out. Though finding good content is a constant concern, I have found that the longer I do this, the more the newsletter seems to write itself (though chasing my Chapter Presidents for their contribution can be a task in itself). Our last newsletter was 20 pages long and the only advertisement included was a one page ad dedicated to the company sponsoring that month's meeting.

A Source of Inspiration

Whenever I get emails from Chapter members commending the newsletter, I am reminded of how proud I am of how much this newsletter has grown over the years. The newsletter has become a great source of enjoyment and inspiration to become more active in the IRWA. I recently obtained my SR/WA and the knowledge received from all of that training has helped me do my job better. Last year, I was nominated as Chapter Secretary and this year, I was inaugurated as the 2nd Vice President of Chapter 52. My nomination caused some worry among members who believed I would have to give up the newsletter, but I have decided that I will continue my duties as newsletter editor. After all, the experience has been worth its weight in gold. ✪

Mary Lou Gayle, SR/WA, is a member of Region 4, Chapter 52. She works for the City of Virginia Beach, Public Works-Real Estate division. She is the proud mother of two children, grandmother of two grandbabies and owns a black pug named Abby.