



## Bringing Everything into **Alignment**

Marketing industry relevance  
to the users of our services

*An Interview with IRWA International President  
**Lisa R. Harrison, SR/WA, R/W-URAC, R/W-RAC, R/W-NAC***

To say that Lisa has a passion for right of way and a laser-focused determination to advance the profession would be an understatement. Asked where she gets her motivation and drive, she'll tell you that it's the members that inspire her to do more. And doing more is what Lisa is all about. Regardless of which mountain needs climbing, Lisa will manage to go over and beyond it.

In a recent interview, Lisa outlines a new pathway for growing the Association and explains the collaborative process behind its evolution.

**BY BARBARA BILLITZER**

### What do you see as the most compelling reason for being an IRWA member?

For me, that's easy. I like hanging around with people who emphasize ethics, education and camaraderie as a way to improve their profession. Add the fact that so many of our members volunteer on behalf of the Association – *hello, my kind of people!*

### How can someone maximize the value they receive from IRWA membership?

Truthfully, it depends on your level of involvement. As with nearly everything, the more you put into it, the more you get out of it. Fortunately, our Association membership has intrinsic value. For example, you can be a member who receives the magazine, attends an occasional chapter meeting, but maybe you feel you can't be active at the region or international level without employer support. Just by virtue of being a member, you have more information available about the profession than a non-member. Every issue of Right of Way Magazine is filled with industry-relevant information. Every networking event is designed to build relationships and exchange knowledge. This enhances the value you bring to your employer and results in more opportunities for advancement.

For me personally, being active at the international level has taken that value and compounded it several fold. As a member of the relocation community at the international level, IRWA has provided me with direct access to experts in the Uniform Act, including our federal partners, potential clients, potential employees and knowledgeable competitors. I believe asking for a seat at the table shows all of the players that you are committed to your own professional development by being current, staying connected and ultimately getting credentialed.

### How important is employer support?

I have been lucky in that I have always had employer support. Yet, we know that there are members who want to be active

at the region or international level, but feel they can't without financial support. I want every member to know that active membership is an investment in yourself. Every meeting, class, seminar and conference is an opportunity to get better at your craft and surround yourself with people trying to do the same.

### You mentioned credentialing. Have your IRWA credentials made a difference in your career?

Absolutely. I am fortunate that some of my biggest clients are also members of the Association, and they recognize the hours of course work, years of experience and dedication it takes to earn the SR/WA designation and the specialty certifications. Those clients have built IRWA's credentialing (or its equivalent) into their qualification requirements for right of way services. The client wins because they are getting the most educated and experienced workforce available. I win by being qualified to compete, and knowing that I am prepared to take on the client's toughest challenges.

### How do we make membership, particularly credentialed membership, a differentiator?

I believe the ultimate goal of every IRWA leader is to make membership and credentials a differentiator in both position and compensation. There is one path to that goal that I can see - make sure the credentials convey something that is meaningful and relevant to the users of our services.

### How can we position our credentials as more meaningful to the various users?

Let me set the stage a little. Our profession is primarily comprised of four main industries— transportation, oil and gas pipeline, electric and utilities, and local public agencies.

Each industry has its own unique source of funding, legislation, regulation, jargon and best practices. And each of these industries

is supported by a multitude of disciplines, such as valuation, relocation, surveying and engineering, and environmental, among others.

No one can disagree that a person who is educating themselves, being active as a volunteer for their profession, communicating the best practices back to the industry, and using those best practices to enhance their job performance is a better hire than someone who is isolated within an office environment.

But the users of our services want to know that a member's education and experience is relevant to the specific industry they represent. Our credentials must clearly communicate that the member has taken intense course curriculum, taught by exceptional instructors who are practitioners in the field. That education, in combination with the individual's experience in a specific industry, demonstrates proficiency and expertise in a particular discipline, or ideally, the industry as a whole.

As a result, if we can align the structure, education, events and credentialing of our organization by industry so that we can market the industry relevance to the users of our services, membership will become that significant differentiator in the profession.



Attaining her SR/WA designation in 2000, Lisa shared the educational milestone with Alex Souder, SR/WA, R/W-RAC and the late W. Howard Armstrong, SR/WA, her longtime mentor.

In recognition of Lisa's contributions to the Association, she received the Region 2 Professional of the Year Award from Wayne Goss, SR/WA and Randy Williams, SR/WA in 2005.



### Sounds like we need to rethink the way our courses support these industry driven credentials. Where do we start?

For the last few years, the International Governing Council and International Professional Development Committee (along with all the international committees) have been working diligently on addressing this issue. To help us better understand the perceptions of education and credentialing among the users of our services, we hired a research firm to conduct an industry survey, and as a result, we uncovered some important needs in the marketplace. Based in part on those findings, the development of four industry-driven pathways to the SR/WA is underway. In addition, we are establishing a communication model that is designed to showcase our access to professionals around the globe. This new model is best practices and information driven rather heavily dependent on policy and procedure efforts.

### It sounds great, but how do we pay for it?

Quality is worth the price, but it does have one. The IPDC has been working on a wish list and a proposed budget for a five-year education plan, and the IGC is meeting this fall to begin budget talks for the next fiscal year. My goal is to walk out of that meeting with each region having a specific dollar amount we need to generate to achieve this plan!

Now more than ever, our members need to be donating what they can to our Education Foundations. If your employer pays your dues, first tell them thanks, and then encourage them to include the \$20 donation to the Foundations. Each member should also give what they can individually. This effort is for you! We want your professional development efforts to pay off in job opportunities and money.

For chapters who have fundraising events where the money is used outside our profession, my suggestion is to refocus all of our financial strength internally. By donating those funds to the foundations, we can accomplish the Association's goals more quickly than we can afford to now. Also, if you don't have a fundraiser planned, start planning. Set a dollar amount goal for your chapter to raise each year of the five-year plan. Incorporate young professionals in your event planning to broaden its appeal. Donations are critical, but we also need to raise the top line of the Association to generate capital to match the investments by the Foundations.

### We have been doing well financially this year. How does the coming year look?

Outstanding! Class size counts are steadily climbing. Online course participation continues to grow, and we have been exceeding our membership goals. The economy around the world seems to be improving, and we are reaping some of those benefits. In the United States, both sides of the aisle fully understand that infrastructure is critical to our ability to function globally and locally.

We are introducing a new marketing effort that has the potential to generate significant revenue to support our strategic plan. The chapter and region leaders are going to appreciate this plan because it centralizes much of what they do locally.

### Can you fill us in on this new marketing effort?

You bet. Many of our chapters work independently or in conjunction with the region to secure continuing education credit for IRWA courses. For those who are managing such an effort, the commitment is significant. The process can be costly, time-consuming and it requires an ongoing effort. The effort must be done per course, per discipline and per licensing body. Just think of the number of course/licensing body scenarios.



With life partner Jeff Davis and daughter Ashleigh at her side, Lisa is able to channel her drive, energy and passion for the right of way profession.

As she assumed the role of IRWA's International President, Lisa invited her father Fred on stage to share in the installation proceedings.



If we were able to manage this process centrally, we could market our courses and membership to professionals outside the Association and expand our reach dramatically. There are literally millions of real estate agents, appraisers, lawyers, surveyors and others who could also benefit from taking our courses, especially if they could earn continuing education credits toward other industry designations.

Up until now, a centralized marketing effort would not have been feasible. But thanks to the budgeting efforts of my predecessor, the Association has hired two new staff members (see Industry Buzz) to drive these kinds of external marketing efforts. As each member reads this, we are one step closer to maximizing the potential of our courses as continuing education for other credentials. More bang for the buck, and everyone wants that!

### Rumor has it that you are not very technology savvy, but that you love Twitter. Do you think social media has a place in our Association?

Absolutely, and for several reasons. It's true that I don't know very much about computers. However, I really am amazed by how quickly we can communicate through Twitter, and I believe social media can accomplish several things for our Association. It can increase our ability to become better known to the users of our services because we can access their social media outlets and engage them in the communication process. Project and job opportunities can be readily communicated, and quick access to market information gives members more value. Twitter is also the fastest way to let our members know about breaking news that impacts our chapters, regions, industries and disciplines. I would love to see us take

the breaking news and generate discussions among the membership about how the news directly influences our profession. We should be using this information to fill our newsletters and educate decision makers about important issues.

Leveraging technology to disseminate information is critical if you want to attract new, younger professionals. Young members are key to our future success, as they are tomorrow's leaders. Therefore, embracing the various technological advances is critical to our growth as an organization. I encourage you to follow me on twitter at @IRWAPrez, and stay connected with your colleagues as well.



Lisa follows her own advice when it comes to supporting the Education Foundations. To raise funds, she raffled off her time at the baseball game, serving food and drinks to the highest bidder.

### We know about Lisa the right of way professional. Tell us something about Lisa the person.

Most people don't know that I'm an animal lover and operate a non-profit called The TenCount Foundation, which takes in stray dogs and provides lifetime housing and care. I say lifetime care because I can't ever adopt them out. (I would have to hire a private investigator to make sure it was a good home first.) We also provide financial relief to people who can't afford to spay and neuter their pets. To everyone reading this, I encourage you to help control the unwanted pet population by spaying and neutering your pets. Suddenly I feel like the Bob Barker of right of way!

### Any final thoughts?

Just a word of thanks to all of the staff and volunteer leaders who are working hard to help us reach our goal of increased industry relevance and discipline expertise. The exciting things that are happening in our Association are only possible because of these dedicated individuals.

We are an organization that's built on a foundation of professional ethics, quality education and the essential networking opportunities that connect us all. As members, we should recognize that this Association is worth investing our valuable time, energy and money. 🌟