



Elevating the Association

There's no better time than the present

BY JAKE FARRELL, SR/WA

There are many exciting changes and achievements that have taken place recently, and I'd like to share what the Association has accomplished so far and where we're headed.

Headquarters Staff

Staff support at headquarters is vital to IRWA's success, and it's essential we continue building a strong foundation to ensure the Association is supported in achieving its Strategic Objectives.

As part as his role of executive director, Tim Drennan, CAE, is accountable for marketing the Association as he focuses on growing and expanding membership. These endeavors require that the right staff are in place to accomplish these goals. As such, Tim worked with the IEC to finalize the staff organization chart; the new chart aligns staff titles with their specific functions and responsibilities.

To fill the senior roles on staff, Tim recommended the promotions of Amir Vafamanesh to organizational learning & development manager and Vivian Nguyen to editor & communications manager, which was approved by the IEC. Tim is currently working with senior staff to fill four additional open positions while Jade Meador, CMP, deputy executive director, has assumed general oversight of the Membership Services department with member services managers reporting to her.

Lastly, there has been much discussion in the past several years regarding the title of senior staff leader at headquarters. To better align ourselves with other nonprofit associations, we believe the title of chief executive officer should be removed from our bylaws and replaced with executive director, which better encompasses the position's responsibilities.

It is paramount that we work together collectively.

Membership & Marketing

In turning our attention towards membership, our new member gain is slightly below our five-year average but is trending higher than last year. We are approaching to finish this fiscal year with similar member numbers as last year. My lofty challenge to double membership in three years has forced us to rethink the way we look at membership recruitment and retention.

The Marketing and Membership Committee is working with the communications team staff to develop social media training for our Chapters. This will help Chapters engage and push information through digital channels and bring industry awareness beyond our Association. Keep an eye out for future social media challenges with incentives that will help push IRWA's message across all digital platforms.

Speaking of growing our digital presence, the IEC Leadership Videos continue to be a great driver to our website. Messages from volunteer leaders around specific areas geared towards the Strategic Objectives have helped increase engagement and elevate our work. Our latest video was on education — education is one leg of the tripod that holds up our Association, and it's an area we are rapidly growing in and constantly improving.

Education

I'm pleased to share that our education has grown year-to-date compared to last year, which is a huge step towards achieving one of our Strategic Objectives — a 5 percent annual growth in education. We have held more courses this year, and the average number of attendees per course has increased; as a whole, on-demand course attendees have decreased from last year. Our education outlook is looking great, with course registrations at the highest it has been all year. We are currently at 96 percent of credentialed and designated members compared to last year.

Regardless of a pandemic that continues to linger, our education is adapting and doing well. We continue to add virtual courses to the schedule. Our goal is to maintain a constant backlog of 150 courses in a six-month outlook. For the first time in over five years, IRWA is on track to reach our budgeted number of scheduled courses.

The International Professional Education Committee (IPEC) has been very busy this year, with a dozen courses in various stages of updating. The IPEC Credentialing Subcommittee recommended a single SR/WA pathway and adjustments to the curriculum for the

RWA, RWP and SR/WA to the International Governing Council (IGC). The IGC approved the recommendation and is developing a rollout plan for implementation. Feedback from the forums will be essential to facilitate a rollout that engages our members and users of our education while elevating the SR/WA.

Finances

Financially, IRWA is sound. All tax documents are completed and under peer review with our auditor. Our CFO and International Treasurer applied for PPP loan forgiveness. The IGC changed our investment portfolio design early this budget year and recently shifted \$300k in cash to investments to better diversify our financial holdings. In addition, Chase Bank is setting up Automatic Clearing House (ACH) capabilities for Chapters banking with Chase. Our CFO continues to meet with national banks in Canada to develop a partnership similar to our structure with Chase Bank in the U.S.

Our International Treasurer and CFO have been working through the process to present a budget to our members. A proposed budget was presented to the IEC at the end of January, which was reviewed and revised to present to the IGC at the end of last month. As the budget makes its way through the Regions for feedback from our international directors, please keep the six Strategic Objectives of our Association in mind. We need to invest our money in ways to expand and improve IRWA in membership, education and industry influence.

New Resources

The newly formed Real Estate Law Committee pushed out their midyear eminent domain and legislation update. The update can be found on our website under Member Resources > Publications > Eminent Domain Reports. This report was also shared through our social media channels and via email. A final report will be presented at the 68th Annual International Education Conference with an opportunity for discussion with the committee.

Closing Thoughts

My challenge to all of you in this issue is to consider how you present yourself as an IRWA member. To truly elevate the IRWA's brand, as individual members, we need to present ourselves as the elite industry professionals due to credentialing and training we received through the Association. It is paramount that we work together collectively and individually to establish our certifications and designations as a crucial part of succeeding in the right of way industry. There is no better time than the present, as the U.S. Infrastructure Bill places us in a prime position to advance and grow our presence.

Thank you again for your trust in me to lead this great Association. I will continue to improve IRWA and its brand. I am always available if you have questions or thoughts. 🌟