





# Reflecting on **35** years

## An interview with Credentialing Manager **Francis Vicente**

**BY VIVIAN NGUYEN**

*Francis joined IRWA HQ in November 1988 as the education services coordinator. Now, as IRWA's credentialing manager, Francis works closely with the rest of the education department and the International Professional Education Committee to help members earn their certification. This November, Francis celebrates 35 years with IRWA HQ, and we asked him to share some of his memories and experience with the Association.*

### **Can you tell us a little about your background before you joined IRWA?**

I have a bachelor's degree in business administration. After I graduated, I was immediately recruited as an office manager for one of the biggest insurance companies in the Philippines, now known as the AIA Philippines Life and General Insurance Company, Inc., at a branch office in my province. I was fortunate that I didn't have to look for a job, which can be very challenging in the Philippines, as there are many college graduates, and that creates a lot of competition in the market. I also worked as a computer operator at the Pacific Banking Corporation in Manila and continued to work the same job for another two years in Saudi Arabia. A year later, I migrated to the United States.

## Do you remember your first day at IRWA HQ? What was your first impression?

I was hired on the spot the day I came to interview with Betsy Fan, who was the executive vice president at that time. I was hired as the education services coordinator, and one of my main responsibilities at the time was updating course histories for our members. I also oversaw the printing and shipment of course materials.

I believe there were only eight or nine of us at that time. The atmosphere was very friendly. I felt like everyone was happy and excited that I'd joined the company.



## How has IRWA HQ evolved since your first day?

As I mentioned, when I started with IRWA, we had less than 10 staff members making phone calls and sending out letters and brochures to reach our members. Now, we have double the staff we had then working as a team to meet the needs of our members. In addition, we also have more trade opportunities and new technology at our disposal. Most importantly, there are more dedicated right of way professionals willing to provide their expertise to help keep our curriculum current and remain invaluable to our members.

## How has your career changed since you started at IRWA?

I was not involved in customer service until I joined IRWA HQ. When I started, there were only two of us back then in charge of the eastern and western Chapters; I oversaw the western part of the U.S. and Canada. Later, I became the state accreditation coordinator and managed the process of getting approval of our courses for qualifying and continuing education credits in different states across the U.S. Currently, I am the credentialing manager, and I help members obtain their designation by explaining the necessary requirements and determining the best way to start their certification. Over time, I realized I enjoy the satisfaction of hearing from our customers and members firsthand and being able to directly help them with their needs. While talking to members, I learned of the issues they face in pursuing their certification and how they overcame those challenges. I took that knowledge and was able to help future members by advising them on how to resolve their issues based on what others have done in the past.

## Why do you think you chose to stay at IRWA HQ for the last 35 years?

Time flies so fast — it doesn't feel like it's been 35 years, so I must be enjoying my job! I had never stayed in one position until I came here. There's always something new to learn. I have gained so much insight and met many people while working with International Committee members. There's always something new to discover, so there's never a dull day working at IRWA HQ.

## What is one of the biggest lessons you've learned in your professional life?

Always do your best and never stop learning from people with more experience because they will help you grow personally and professionally. Always share what you have learned, and always be ready to help. People, in return, will share their knowledge with you, and the cycle continues.

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## As you reflect on your experience with IRWA, do any thoughts come to mind?

I only heard of right of way when I started working at IRWA HQ. I remember thinking to myself: what is that? Over time, you realize that right of way is all around us — your home, neighborhood, roads, highways and bridges that surround you every day. I've gained a real appreciation for the industry.

I have come to know a lot of good, friendly and interesting people through our members and the HQ team. I have met many people while working here: fellow staff, supervisors and executive directors/CEOs. All in all, I continue to have a good working relationship with them (previous and present company included). I've always have good relationships with my supervisors — they trust me and give me the freedom and flexibility to work on my own terms.

## What is the best piece of advice you've ever received?

There's always a solution to every problem. Life is full of problems. No matter how difficult it looks, there's always a solution. You cannot solve it by yourself sometimes, so don't hesitate to ask for help. That's what family and friends are for. If it seems hopeless, leave it, and a solution might appear later. If not, accept it, and learn from it. Don't treat it as a problem but as an experience to be learned. Soren Kierkegaard said, "Life is not a problem to be solved but a reality to be experienced."

## What do you enjoy doing outside of work?

I love gardening. I'm always happy and fascinated when watching a small seedling or plant grow. When I buy plants, I get the smallest one, because I love to watch them grow and bloom or bear fruits — plus, it's cheaper! Aside from blooming plants, I have lemon, orange and pomegranate trees in my backyard that bear fruits every year. It's always good and satisfying to "enjoy the fruits of your labor" — literally. I'm a homebody. I enjoy staying at home, gardening, relaxing and watching movies during my free time. Currently, I'm curious to learn more about how to weave baskets. I see a lot of interesting videos on YouTube on weaving baskets out of bamboo, vines, reeds, pine needles and many types of natural fibers.



## What do you see for the future of IRWA?

I can see only good things for IRWA's future. It will continue to progress for the better because of the dedicated members working voluntarily for the betterment of IRWA. The International Professional Education Committee alone has a brilliant chair, vice chairs and members — experts in their fields who are devoted to help improve IRWA's course curriculum, certification/designation and methods of instruction. I'm sure all other International Committees possess the same experts and professionals working together to keep IRWA as a premier right of way organization, as has been since the beginning. 🌟