



NEW YEAR, NEW CHALLENGES & NEW BEGINNINGS

Looking back and moving forward

BY SHARON SLAUENWHITE, SR/WA



New Year's traditions often entail looking back on the year that's just passed, recalling the lessons learned from our successes and failures and then turning the page to the new year which promises fresh challenges and beginnings.

We all have faced challenges in 2020. Due to the global pandemic, the past year has brought us face-to-face with significant changes. As an Association, we have maneuvered through the obstacles that impacted how we do business and provide education as well as how our members congregate. We have succeeded in bringing our services and education to our members and have done so in ways that have enabled them to continue their work and ongoing education efforts while staying connected; we have kept abreast of industry adaptations in response to the consequences of the pandemic.

Looking Back

The Association has benefited greatly from the combined efforts of our staff, leaders, volunteers and members. As always, we have relied on each other for support and advice. The ties that keep us engaged with our work and engaged with one another have been strengthened by our members' deliberate efforts to maintain contact and connections with one another by telephone, teleconference and in person (but always at least 0.09 of a chain apart). We have shared our stories and best practices of how to navigate this new normal such as how to connect and engage with landowners who are unable or unwilling to meet in person, or teaching creative work-arounds for appraisal inspections when access to a property is limited by public health restrictions. In this publication and in



**The Association
has benefited
greatly from
the combined
efforts of our
staff, leaders,
volunteers and
members.**



various Chapter newsletters, subject matter experts share new best practices and offer new solutions to COVID-19-related impacts on projects, property valuations and much more. Our chapter leaders have reached out to our fellow members to ensure they are staying engaged. All these connections and so many others have contributed to our membership and the Association having a successful 2020.

As we collectively look towards 2021 and consider what opportunities await us, the Association will continue focusing on supporting our members on many fronts. Our experiences this past year have demonstrated that we are resilient, creative and well equipped to navigate challenges and unforeseen circumstances. We have found the silver linings in a year of unprecedented change in how we do business, communicate with one another and execute our daily work. We have become comfortable with remote learning and networking, and this will continue. Updates and improvements to the education curriculum are happening daily — this, too, will continue in the new year. Members have more opportunities than ever before to access and participate in online and virtual courses. Our region and chapter leaders will continue to work together to identify new and creative learning opportunities to ensure members stay engaged with their chapters and the Association. Planning continues for our Annual International Conference, which we plan to present in a hybrid format so that virtual and in person attendance is possible.

Moving Forward

As we turn our attention to 2021 and beyond, the International Executive Committee and the International Governing Council are actively working with region and chapter leaders on the creation of a strategic plan that will guide us in our efforts over the next several years. Feedback gathered from forums will ensure that the Association is guided by the priorities identified by the membership. In addition, the ongoing work of the International Diversity, Equality and Inclusion Taskforce, as well as the International Industry and Service

Committees will inform us of where our attention should be focused.

As we consider the future and the promise it holds for new challenges and beginnings, so too must we consider what life will be like in a post-COVID-19 world and how much work is ahead of us as we continue to improve the quality of life for the communities where we live and work. For example, no matter where you live, the pandemic and climate change has brought to the forefront new considerations of how transportation and energy systems are impacted. As the trend of working from home becomes the norm, where teleconferencing and cloud-based sharing of data enable more flexible lifestyles for workers, IRWA members will be at the forefront of expanding the necessary telecommunication and electric utility networks to service those needs. Social distancing restrictions will not disappear overnight and new health guidelines will see sustained changes to things such as public transit. Homeowners relocating to rural areas away from city centers will change the balance of transit needs. Again, IRWA members will be leading the planning and building transportation systems that will respond to changing needs of the traveling public. The business of negotiation and communication with stakeholders and project partners has become a socially distanced endeavor, requiring increased sensitivity and awareness in an atmosphere that is charged, at times, with new levels of anxiety and stress. IRWA members have the necessary skills, learned through experience and training provided by our Association, to ensure successful outcomes.

Conclusion

This will be a year of opportunities to make positive changes, and I have no doubt that IRWA members will rise to the occasion. Please engage your region and chapter leaders and offer them your suggestions and insights. I look forward to what we will do together in the coming months, and I look forward to seeing what we can accomplish. Welcome 2021, let's get to work! Thank you, merci. 🍀