



# THE CAROL A. CROFT FINISH LINE SCHOLARSHIP

An Interview with RWIEF President Leslie Finnigan, SR/WA

BY VIVIAN NGUYEN



*The Right of Way International Education Foundation (RWIEF) announced a new scholarship in honor of the late Carol A. Croft, who previously served as the Foundation's president. We asked the current RWIEF president Leslie Finnigan, SR/WA, to tell us more about the Carol A. Croft Finish Line Scholarship.*

### **Can you tell us about Carol, her work with the Right of Way International Education Foundation and how she inspired the idea behind the scholarship?**

Carol was so much a part of the Foundation for years and loved the organization wholeheartedly. She has had a lasting impact on so many of us through working with her and knowing her. Carol was about education and supporting individuals to seek further training in any profession but especially the right of way field.

In 2021, Carol and I met with Amir Vafamanesh and Anthony Campbell from Headquarters to discuss an idea that Carol had presented earlier to them about two new scholarships — the Leaders Light the Way Scholarship and the Finish Line Scholarship. We were able to put the Leaders Light the Way Scholarship in motion in early 2021 but decided to hold off on the latter.

Carol felt strongly about helping members complete their SR/WA. She understood the time, commitment and money involved in getting this designation and that so many individuals were doing it on their own time and at their own expense. This was the premise for the Finish Line Scholarship — to get those individuals who were almost completed with their program over the finish line.

The Leaders Light the Way Scholarship took off, and at the same time, we were looking at the credentialing program that was in flux, so to speak. It was hard to determine who might be qualified for the Finish Line Scholarship at that time, so the focus remained on the initial scholarship and its second iteration, which proved to be successful.

Unfortunately, we lost Carol last October before we could officially push the Finish Line Scholarship out to the members. She was on the planning committee last summer and knew we were working on it in September. Earlier this spring, with Amir and Tim's help on who would qualify, the trustees of the Foundation put the finishing touches on the scholarship, and the trustees overwhelmingly approved and felt that the name of the scholarship should be made in Carol's honor. This wouldn't have been Carol's idea, but we can and did make that decision to honor her with this memorial scholarship in her name.



### Can you give us a brief overview of the scholarship?

The Carol A. Croft Finish Line Scholarship will fund any active member who has been a member for at least two years and who has two or less courses to take to complete the SR/WA program. Wouldn't it be great to see all of those new SR/WAs at the Long Beach conference next year?!

### Can you explain the requirements and application process?

This was a surprise to most of the recipients, I hope, because we tried really hard to keep this a secret. There was no application process. Amir and Tim provided us a list of those candidates that only needed to complete two or less courses to complete the program. The cutoff date for that list was June 1, 2023. That list became the qualifications and no application was needed. From that point, we had our list of scholarship recipients.

### What do the funds cover, and how long do recipients have to use the funds?

The funds cover any two courses needed to complete their SR/WA, no matter what the cost of the course. It could be a one-day course or a three-day course. In addition, it will cover the cost of the SR/WA study session. The funds only cover the course fees, not any travel expenses. The scholarship is effective July 1, 2023, and expires June 30, 2024.

### Carol announced the Leaders Light the Way (LLW) Scholarship at the 2021 conference in San Antonio, Texas. The LLW 2.0 Scholarship has experienced a lot of success this year. Can you share some of the work that went on behind the scenes that contributed this recent success?

The Foundation received some feedback on the Leaders Light the Way program about the uncertainty over the scholarship qualifications, which created challenges for members to qualify even if they had been active in their Chapter. We decided to reboot the scholarship, and last summer in 2022, we announced Leaders Light the Way 2.0 Scholarship with different criteria and a simpler application process. We are happy to report had much better success with a great turnout of 65 scholarship recipients.



### **Were there challenges faced while developing the Carol A. Croft Finish Line Memorial Scholarship?**

Within the Foundation, absolutely not. We all wanted to make this happen for the members and for Carol. I only wish she could have been there to see the dream she had come to life. I am sure she is keeping an eye on us though and is doing a happy dance.

The only challenge was obtaining the list of qualified individuals finalized and sent to Headquarters in time so that we could make the announcement in Denver and have the list of scholarship recipients. Headquarters did it, and we appreciate them prioritizing this so it could happen.

### **How long did the process take to create this scholarship?**

Unbelievably, not very long. It was such a good idea with a pretty simple concept. Once we were ready to move forward with Carol's idea, we had the bones of the scholarship done very quickly. It then took putting the MOU together for the RWIEF and IRWA to agree on and sign.

### **Are there any key players of creating this scholarship that you'd like to shout out?**

Of course, I have to say Carol for one because she was the instigator, but I would like to also mention that all the trustees had a hand in this new scholarship. We want to especially thank Tim Drennan, CAE, Amir Vafamanesh and the Headquarters staff for their help in getting this processed so quickly. We approved this in April 2023 at the Foundation meeting, and this had to come together by conference so that we could make the announcement at the awards luncheon. I also want to thank Joe Neighbors, SR/WA, our ex officio, for his guidance on all things legal, including putting together the MOU between IRWA and the Foundation for this scholarship.

### **What do you hope recipients will gain from this scholarship?**

Our hope is to see all of these recipients get their SR/WA this next year and walk across the stage at the awards luncheon at the annual conference in Long Beach next year. We also hope these recipients see the value that we place on IRWA members and our support for furthering the educational opportunities for our members. 🌟