



SPOTLIGHT ON JONNY GARNER

Describe your professional career. How did you first become interested in the right of way industry?

I owned a mobile disc jockey and karaoke business for over 20 years. As I noticed a decline of yearly bookings, I started looking for other possible opportunities.

My brother was a landman and a crew chief of a new project and asked me to join his team. He felt my experience of dealing with the public (which, at times back then, may have been in a slightly inebriated state) would transfer well in doing land work.

In 2011, I entered the energy industry working on a seismic project in North Central West Virginia, which was a perfect project to start off my new career. I worked in both the field and doing courthouse research. In 2012, I moved to a project in southeastern Ohio. My primary duty was “trying” to purchase ROW options for an exploration





company, but without any official training on right of way acquisition. It was unsuccessful.

After that, it seemed right of way projects continued to cross my path, and I realized training would be key to my future success.

How did you hear about IRWA and how long have you been with the Association?

In 2015, I started working on a modernization project in Western Pennsylvania. The project was to replace 32 miles of 60-year-old, 20-inch pipeline. As the work began, I realized I needed to look into training options beyond the AAPL. This is when I first became aware of the IRWA and joined the Association.

We understand that you've made notable contributions towards establishing provisional Chapter 88 in Pittsburgh. Could you share some of your achievements with us?

First off, we had great support from the Chapters of Region 5, which have helped get us to this point. We had an average attendance of 22 attendees per luncheon. And with an average of ten IRWA members showing up consistently to each event, we could see there was a building interest in what the IRWA had to offer — that allowed us to build from there. We are currently interacting with a database well above 500 contacts, all of which have expressed interest in our group. I am proud to also note that our attendance numbers have grown faster since the COVID-19 pandemic began.

In order to build those numbers, we have found some things that have been beneficial:

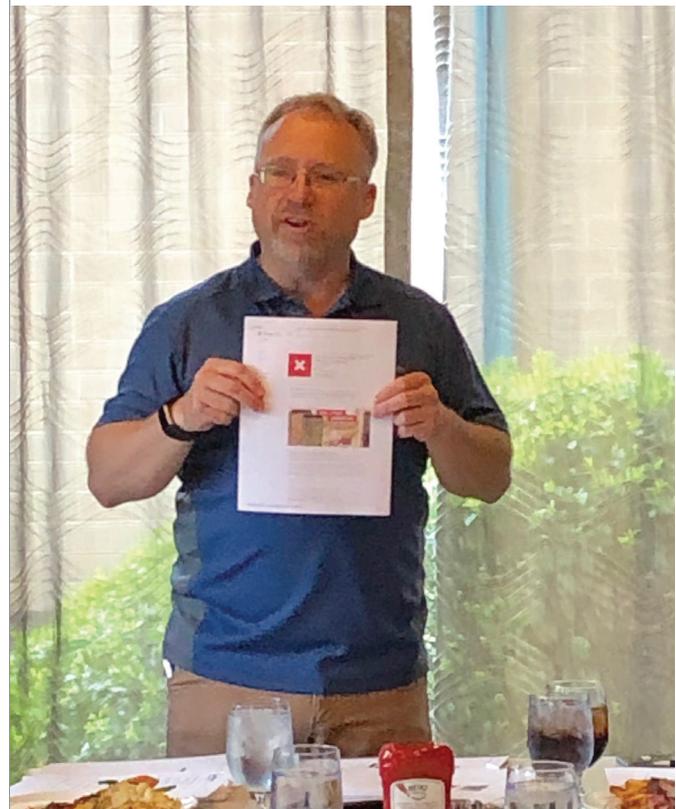
- We recognized that building relationships was the core function of the group.
- As we began to meet we saw the importance of making sure that our presenters were covering pertinent subjects while keeping things fresh, current and focused. A great example was Jon Clark covering the value proposition of land-use to farmers! He was able to convey that a farmer looks upon acres differently than a typical owner because each acre represents a specific part of their livelihood. And with that, offered different techniques for ROW negotiation which can result in signatures versus shotguns!
- From our first meeting, we made sure that EVERYONE felt welcomed. It was clear that the more diverse the group, the more stable and dynamic the events could be. We found it was “what you don’t know, you don’t know” that brought value in the training.
- As simple as it may seem, FOOD was a major attraction for the group meeting. Not because of good food, but because many only have their lunch hour in order to fit in a meeting, therefore we had to find a reasonable way to combine an enjoyable lunch with our presentations.

- I have to believe that the prior years of running a successful “event” business has allowed me to establish a better framework for a fluid venue where content, community and timing have to balance. In short, it is a joy to find the hour or so out of the month, to attend and learn and interact with other professionals.

What inspired you to establish an IRWA Chapter in Pittsburgh?

The original idea wasn’t to start a chapter, it was to have an IRWA presence in the area. Ryan Pankiewicz, RWP, spearheaded the cause as the course coordinator for Chapter 13, which was hosted in Pittsburgh back in August 2017. Along with the courses, there was a happy hour and I got an invite from a coworker to attend. “Sure!”

There were only seven people there that night, and we decided that we should meet the following month for lunch and to network with other ROW professionals. I volunteered to help with promoting the group and managing the contact list. We saw growth and interest, so we continued meeting monthly.





In June 2018, Ryan moved to Tulsa, OK, to work on a transportation project. I took the lead on managing the group, and we continued to build in numbers and interest. In June of 2019, attendees asked Ryan, who was visiting the area, if the group would ever be more than a lunch group. This question propelled our efforts toward chapter hood.

In all, the process was organic, as one step led to another, and encouragement fueled the interest to continue. By the time we realized we should be a chapter, we were already acting like our vision of a proactive chapter.

Could you tell us more about the monthly luncheons and other significant events the Chapter has held?

Prior to COVID-19, we met each second Tuesday of the month in the South Pointe area of Pittsburgh — an area created by the boom of Marcellus, and known as the center of major exploration and transmission companies of the industry.

Each month, we would have a speaker present a topic relative to right of way and energy as the anchor to meet up with others. This allowed for networking and discussions on current events and opportunities as well as honing interactions around common work subjects.

We reacted quickly to the changes that COVID-19 introduced and became virtual in our meetings since April of 2020. This radical change opened our events to others around the country to join in. We also found ways to upload our monthly presentations to our YouTube channel. We plan to continue capturing our live events even after we return to in-person gatherings.

We found that sharing our sign-in sheet (as permitted by guests) to encourage outside networking has allowed for interactions beyond our monthly events, to the gain of the group as a whole.



What should readers know about Chapter 88, and what do you envision for its future?

We have a dedicated executive board that has helped throughout the process. We are currently up for approval as a full chapter, with the next priority being our education course schedule.

Accreditation is key, so we are focused on that accomplishment. We were fortunate to host a course back in September through the generosity of Gordon MacNair, SR/WA. Mr. MacNair volunteered his expertise as a certified instructor, which allowed our group the benefit of a course completion, even in our infancy of obtaining chapter hood.

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

My first year out of high school, I was working as an electrician's helper in Northern Virginia and I was told by a mechanic, "Your best asset is a thick and updated address book, because you're not going to know everything, so you better know who to call for the answer." I took this to heart and this advice has helped me build relationships over multiple careers, and has been the cornerstone of moving the Pittsburgh Right of Way Group (PITROW Group) towards becoming Chapter 88.

Thank you for taking the time and allowing us to get to know you and Chapter 88's beginnings better. One last question to round off this interview: if you could have lunch with anyone from history or fiction, who would it be and why?

It's not very deep or philosophical, but I would love one more lunch with my father, just one more time, at a local diner. 🍴

Member Spotlight is a wonderful place to introduce yourself or to celebrate a fellow member's contributions to the IRWA. For more information or to submit a member for consideration, please contact Vivian Nguyen at nguyen@irwaonline.org.