



WHY I AM A MEMBER

Now more than ever

BY: KEVIN M. MULDOWNEY, SR/WA

Does membership in the IRWA have value? Of course, yes!! As Carolinas Chapter 31 membership chair, of course I am going to say that, right? Well, that is probably true, but also just as valid are the benefits and value that the IRWA membership provides each member.

As membership chair for the past five years, it has truly been an honor and a privilege to be part of such an exciting and innovative group of right of way industry professionals. In addition, being an active member has, without a doubt, enriched my membership experience with IRWA while also enhancing my career satisfaction and furthering my professional opportunities.

Like many of us, my arrival into this wonderful world of right of way acquisition was not planned. As a political science major in college, I spent time in other industries. However, in 2003, I began in the right of way field upon accepting a position with the City of Charlotte (NC) real estate division. I have been fortunate to be involved in the acquisition of land and property rights ever since.



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Frank G. Mundy
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I've come to realize how fortunate it was that my supervisor at the time was a strong advocate for professional education and a proponent of the IRWA. I know now that he wanted professionally educated agents on staff representing the City. That ideal has carried forward with me during the last 18 years. I follow his example by conveying the importance of IRWA membership and professional education to others in our industry.

In fact, when a job opportunity took me to the upper Midwest of the U.S. to work on the Keystone XL pipeline project, I joined Dakotas Chapter 72. Again, understanding the importance of staying involved in the professional association for right of way regardless of the fact I was 1,700 miles from my home. It afforded me the occasion to be around "my people" and to make new friends! Furthermore, during those times when working with right of way colleagues that were not IRWA members, I found myself encouraging them to join. So, I guess Chapter membership chair was always part of my destiny.

During Chapter 31's membership renewal efforts this year, our membership committee arrived at an idea where we would ask our Chapter leadership team to provide a testimonial in response to this statement: "Why I Am a Member of the IRWA." We would then use these testimonials in an email blast just prior to the membership renewal deadline to encourage members to renew.

In preparing the email blast, I had the pleasure to read through each of these testimonials. It was wonderful to see the varied reasons that were offered — even more so when you consider the diverse occupations of our members. Though the IRWA predominantly consists of real estate professionals in the right of way field, of course we also have appraisers, surveyors, engineers and attorneys. The benefits of membership stated were consistent regardless of industry. They included educational opportunities, getting advice and sharing of best practices, networking, professional development, leadership opportunities, assistance in finding a job and even establishing personal friendships!





I would add, among the challenges I believe many of us faced in 2020 were, at best, instability and at worst, the loss of workload and for some their employment. Again, IRWA membership perhaps provided an outlet for members to receive needed encouragement and support. Or, maybe it was a way to feel connected and, for some, experience a degree of normalcy even though it was far from normal. Like others, Chapter 31 was adapting by having quarterly seminars virtually and directing members to online courses rather than having in-person classes. Some chapters have even hosted online socials.

Furthermore, during “normal times,” the member benefits of education and professional growth opportunities, not to mention the inside track on job leads, are important — during 2020, they became that much more vital. In other words, these benefits that we casually discuss became critically needed tools for many of our members.

As I have mentioned regarding my own path to the right of way industry, it is rare that someone who is in our industry as a right of way agent makes a direct line to work in the field.

It is because of that less-than-formal university-level education as to why a strong and vibrant education mission is critical. Think about it — unlike an accountant who obtained formal training at a university or college, we rely on the IRWA to furnish that professional-level education, and we look to it to set a high standard.

To that point, and as I stated in an article I wrote for our Chapter 31 newsletter a few years ago about my own IRWA education: “... perhaps it is utilizing a technique I learned in a negotiation class; or the learned ability to interpret and then simply explain road plans to a property owner; or, having the knowledge to comprehend and then present a complex appraisal in an understandable manner when making an offer.” These are knowledge and skills that I did not possess when I entered our industry. It was through excellent

classroom instruction, conversations with fellow students and having resource materials that brought me along to the level of professional right of way agent.

Also, to keep the IRWA’s mission relevant and vibrant for education, leadership development and everything else that the IRWA provides, I strongly believe creating and maintaining a diverse, inclusive and strong member base benefits our association immensely. Your continued membership and active participation in your Chapter, Region and our International Association assures that!

By now it goes without saying I, for one, tremendously value my membership in the International Right of Way Association.

To conclude, I’ll borrow from my Vaughn & Melton colleague Sharon Gillespie’s testimonial from our chapter’s email blast earlier this year: “This organization is full of people who love what they do and want to share that with others. We are a welcoming, educated and connected group of professionals who are thrilled to help others who want to do the same.” I could not agree more! 🌟



Kevin M. Muldowney, aside from being the Carolinas Chapter 31 membership committee chair since 2017, is an acquisition and relocation consultant with Vaughn & Melton Consulting Engineers in Charlotte, North Carolina. He joined the IRWA in 2003 and received the SR/WA designation in 2013 while working with Universal Field Services on the Keystone XL pipeline project in South Dakota.