





# Remembering Our MENTOR

A celebration of Dan Beardsley's life

**BY GORDON MACNAIR, SR/WA**

*This article was adapted from the tribute given by former International IRWA President Gordon MacNair, SR/WA, at Dan Beardsley's Celebration of Life in May 2021, where friends, family and colleagues gathered to remember and honor Dan's legacy.*

**T**he first time that I met Dan was at an IRWA conference in the mid-1990s. Right from my first impression of Dan, I found him to be a very friendly individual who made you feel at ease, especially with that welcoming smile. A few years later, Dan and Don Marx convinced me to run for the International Executive Committee (IEC). Boy, I had no idea what I was in for! Luckily, during my first year on the IEC, Dan decided to join us, and I instinctively knew that his passion and dedication would make him an excellent addition to our team.

As I suspected, I was not disappointed. The more I got to know Dan, the more I was amazed by the way he approached things with a levelheaded and open mind, no matter how controversial, which is an essential quality for a strong leader.

Dan and I served for five years together on the IEC. When I went out as International President in 2005, Dan easily stepped into the role. Even though I was a year ahead of Dan on the IEC, I often considered Dan to be a mentor. His intellect, compassion and the unique way his mind worked was an incredible thing to witness. Looking back now, when I think of Dan “the Mentor,” it’s astonishing to think about how many people he guided within the Association and how those individuals became leaders — Pat Thayer, Faith Roland, Leslie Finnegan and Cyndi Whelpley are just a few examples who immediately come to mind.



I would often refer to Dan as a visionary when it came to our Association. His knowledge and understanding of strategic planning were spectacular. Combined with his expertise, he was an integral part in bringing IRWA to a whole new level. Dan's forward-thinking was second to none. His vision included a personal goal, which he referred to as his BHAG (Big Hairy Audacious Goal): he wanted IRWA to become the Global Center for Right of Way Education — this was an actual quote from Dan in 2005.

Well Dan, we are there today. We have international affiliations and partnerships with Mexico, Australia, South Africa, Nigeria, the UK, Japan and Germany. So my friend, your BHAG has been realized.

Though some of you may not know this, Dan loved napkins. I can remember when we would show up for the second day of our IEC meeting, and Dan would haul out a napkin with all his notes. I would be sitting there, laughing to myself, knowing that he was out the night before with his good friend, Howard Armstrong, and obviously they had done some brainstorming together — and we were about to hear all their ideas. Some of these napkin ideas were amazing and a few became part of our strategic plan. I know, I know, I'm now telling stories out of school, but Don Marx, Jim Finnegan and Jim Struble can attest to this.

But napkins weren't his preferred medium for just brainstorming. They were also his go-to when it came to writing impromptu speeches — something that Dan particularly excelled at. I remember in June 2005 at the annual conference in Toronto, Dan and I were sitting together at the head table. He was getting ready to deliver his speech at any moment as our incoming International President, but he was busy writing away on his napkin. I leaned over and asked, "...what are you doing?" He replied that he was writing out his presidential speech, which he delivered shortly thereafter. And of course, in true Dan fashion, his presentation was impeccable!

That was Dan. He was unapologetically himself, a visionary leader, and enthusiastic about his work. When I spoke to Dan last, we were both in a training session with headquarters last summer in a discussion to roll out the new virtual education training platform, Newrow, for our members. Guess who was the first instructor to roll out this program?

When I think back, it's hard to remember a time when he wasn't at the forefront of our education program. From the start, Dan believed that we needed to develop courses to train right of way professionals in gaining the skills needed to become





supervisors and leaders. At the time, our programs were geared towards entry- or journey-level professionals. As a result of his line of thinking, new courses were developed; it is because of his vision that we have courses for right of way professionals at all levels. In fact, as recently as last year, Dan developed a course on project management that he delivered for Region 7. Currently, some of us are working with headquarters, IPEC and others to see if we can incorporate Dan's Project Management course or its equivalent to the IRWA course curriculum. This is a legacy that we want to see happen for Dan and his family.

Speaking of his family, Dan was just as passionate about them as he was about the Association. We would often hear him telling stories about Mary Ellen, Sean and Erin — his entire family would accompany him to every annual conference.

With respect to his family, I can remember when Dan and Mary Ellen decided to take Sean and Erin out of school in Alaska for a year. The idea was that they would travel around the lower 48 in their recreational vehicle, and they would homeschool their children. Dan told me how important it was for them to do this, as they wanted their children to experience what the rest of America was all about. He said he wanted his kids to know what it was like to hear crickets outside their window at night, as that was something they hadn't experienced in the north.

When I pause and think of Dan, I think of his friendly smile and his infectious laugh, along with his short-sleeved shirts, regardless of weather. Dan Beardsley was an incredibly special person who inspired many of us. He made a huge impact on our lives. And we are better people because of the amazing legacy he left us.

Dan, my friend, you are missed. I hope you and Howard are up there, developing all kinds of ideas on your napkins.

Until later... ✪



*Gordon MacNair, SR/WA is a right of way infrastructure specialist residing in Ottawa, ON, with his wife Penny and their dog Nelson. Gord is currently serving as the chair of the IRWA International Committee and feels blessed for having known Dan Beardsley.*