Thank you and good morning! It was nice to see so many of you at the reception last night. It has been our pleasure to sponsor or co-sponsor the reception for the past 30+ years. It’s a great way to begin the convention - visiting with old friends and meeting new ones.
This is me attending my first AASHO convention with my parents in Miami Beach! (Note, this was prior to the renaming of AASHO to AASHTO in 1973.)
All of us are involved in some way with building our nation’s infrastructure and - when we do it well - we inspire confidence in progress.

I’ve always had a great appreciation for this organization and the right of way industry. From an early age I became aware of the importance of building our highways and other transportation systems.

I also became aware of how important it is to protect the private property rights of those impacted by these public transportation projects. And, I gained great respect over the years for those of you who work to assure the public is treated fairly when private property is needed for public use.

The people I have worked with over the years in the Federal Highway Administration and in state and local government have been good public servants for whom I have always had the highest respect.

You have always inspired me to have confidence in progress.
I was invited to address you today because many of you expressed interest in the book I wrote about our company history entitled “Inspiring Confidence in Progress.” As it turns out, it is also one of the few publications that documents the period of time prior to the passing of the Uniform Act.

You might be thinking, she just wants us to buy the book! Well we brought about 30 copies to share. So, if you’re interested stop by our booth!

2019 marks the 50th anniversary of our company. Today, I’ll be sharing some of our history, the history of events prior to the passing of the Uniform Act and my thoughts on leadership.
Before I continue, I’d like to credit Dick Moeller – a friend to many in this room and a wealth of knowledge on the Uniform Act – for his contribution to the first three chapters of the book. Dick began his career with the U.S. Bureau of Public Roads in 1963 and retired in 2002 from the Federal Highway Administration after 30 years of service. At the time of his retirement he was Manager of the Office of Real Estate and had been a contributor to the writing of the Uniform Act. [The Bureau of Public Roads was renamed the Federal Highway Administration in 1966.]

I’d like to share a story about Dick that illustrates how hard it is for right of way professionals to gain the respect of engineers. Dick and I were presenting with a team of engineers to the South Florida Water Management District for work on the Comprehensive Everglades restoration program in 2003, right after he joined ORC. We rehearsed all day for a one-hour presentation, of which we were allocated five minutes. In our presentation we said, “This will be a high-profile federally funded project and it will be important to follow the Uniform Act in acquiring property for this project to assure that federal funding will not be in jeopardy.” After we had rehearsed a couple times, the lead engineer pulled us aside and said, “I know you think this is important, but don’t you think we should ask an expert?” Dick and I exchanged a look and then I responded “Did you read Dick’s resume?”

Dick was with O.R. Colan Associates for 15 years. He is dearly missed.
In writing the book, I learned of the conditions of those impacted by Right of Way acquisition prior to the passing of the Uniform Act from three sources:

- Stories from my father;
- Dick Moeller’s personal experiences; and
- Research of newspaper clippings collected by my grandmother.
Here are some of the headlines from my grandmother’s scrapbook. I was fortunate when writing the book to have her extensive collection of articles that chronicled the times, the history of our company and my father’s legacy.
Now let’s take a look at the period prior to the passing of the Uniform Act.

In 1938, President Franklin D. Roosevelt presented a plan for a six-route toll network with 3 E/W and 3 N/S corridors but the Depression era prevented funding from being available for the work. In 1954, under President Dwight D. Eisenhower, Congress enacted the Federal-Aid Highway Act that provided $175 million for 43,000 miles of interstate highways. $175 million in 1954 is equivalent to $1.6 billion in 2019 dollars. You can see there was a period of 16 years when interstate highways were being built across the nation prior to the Uniform Act.

The process varied from state-to-state for right of way acquisition. The Federal Government issued guidelines, but they weren’t mandated. There was no uniformity. There was horse-trading going on, political appointees that were cronies or friends were managing the negotiations and the goal was to get the best deal for the state. People without the means to hire an attorney were taken advantage of. Only 18 states offered any kind of relocation assistance.
A lot of citizens complained to their elected officials, creating a public uproar that motivated Congress to act. Representative Blatnik held Congressional Hearings on these issues and, as a result of what became known as “the Blatnik hearings”, NEPA was enacted in 1968 to address environmental and social justice. The next year Congress passed the Uniform Relocation Assistance and Real Property Acquisition Policies Act of 1970 – the Uniform Act or URA.

The first two decades of ORC were built on our technical expertise in the practical implementation of the Uniform Act (URA) – primarily for highways and airports.
O. R. Colan Associates was founded by my father, Owen Richard Colan, J.D., in 1969 and was one of the very first consulting firms to specialize in providing right of way services for public agencies.

A veteran of WWII, he was educated at Georgetown Law School and discovered the right of way business – accidentally as many of us do – when he was hired to purchase 88 miles of new right of way for the original West Virginia Turnpike. Later he served in the Pennsylvania office of the Bureau of Public Roads (renamed FHWA in 1966) and later as Director of Right of Way for the state of West Virginia.

The infrastructure projects he worked on, and that we all work on today, are the foundation of progress in our country and our communities. It’s something my father was very proud to be part of and I’m proud to continue the tradition.

His transition from public service to business owner coincided with the passing of the Uniform Act of 1970.
Early in his career as Director of Right of Way for the State of West Virginia, my dad was an innovator. He was quoted as saying “The ROW agent is the only man the public ever sees and he must be the best we have.”

Some examples of his innovative approach while he was the Director of Right of Way for WV included:

- Civil Service Status for right of way agents
- Development of a training program
- Written procedure manuals for acquisition, relocation, appraisal and other right of way tasks.
- Establishment of a Research Section that did before and after studies similar to those used today for appraisal waivers.
And here is another innovation... the Control Room or “Nerve Center”. This was the era prior to computers. He created a room where every parcel was tracked in real time on the walls so that the status of every parcel was visible.
He developed two training courses and took them on the road to market our company. A gifted teacher, he would use clever ways to illustrate difficult concepts like partial takings. He would ask a student who was wearing a nice tie to come to the front of the class. He asked the class “What do you think this tie is worth?” They would answer “five dollars”. (This was 1970!) Then he would cut off the bottom of the tie and ask the class “What is it worth now?” In this way he made the class understand how the public feels when a portion of their property is taken for a public project.

His training tradition continues today within ORC with the ORC Training division that develops training for the industry.
My father promoted and pioneered the concept of using consultants for the right of way phase of highway programs. He reasoned that consultants provided the necessary expertise and were a cost-effective option for state highway departments.

His first contract was with Florida DOT after they received a Federal Aid Ineligibility Notice for $50M – in today’s dollars that’s approx. $315M. Construction on a section of I-95 from Broward to Palm Beach was halted until the funds could be recovered.

My father found that appraisers weren’t trained on how to appraise under the Uniform Act and files hadn’t been properly documented. He trained a class of appraisers in six months who then stayed with FDOT. My dad addressed the issues as well, recovered the funding and established that he was someone that could solve a problem.

In this article from a Florida newspaper at the time, John Cashin, Florida’s Acting Transportation Secretary, notes that O.R. Colan Associates “was the only right-of-way consultant firm in the nation working with a state road department... there’s got to be a first for everything.” This has always been part of our company lore!
Over the next two decades, we not only worked on highways but also airports and flood mitigation. We grew to a company of 65 employees. Pictured here are some of the projects from this era.

- Lambert-St. Louis International Airport
- Times Beach, MO Flood Mitigation
- Tampa, FL Veterans Expressway Design Build Highway – the first design build highway in Florida.
Suddenly it all changed in 1989 when my father had a massive heart attack and died. The company’s leadership fell to me as the majority stock holder. He left no will and no succession plan. One week later our bank cancelled our line of credit and I had to use the one life insurance policy he left, in the amount of $50K, for payroll.
My dad was an entrepreneur with extensive technical experience. He tightly controlled all aspects of every contract. I, on the other hand, had been with the company for eight years on the business side. I was focused on accounting and was our computer programmer and editor of our publications. I had limited field experience but recognized that I had managers with 10+ years of experience. I empowered them as my Senior Management Advisory Team and gave them an increased level of authority. It was the right thing to do and the right time - but I did it out of necessity rather than business expertise.
Another decade passed and we reached 100 employees. I realized I was wearing too many hats and began taking the hats off one-by-one with the goal of building a professional leadership team. We began adding professional level personnel.

- 2000: HR professional
- 2000: Proposal Writer
- 2001: CFO
- 2002: IT Director
- 2006: COO

In 2006 I appointed one of our Senior Managers, Steve Toth, to be our COO. Last year he was promoted to President of our organization.

Our Senior Management Advisory Team was now the Leadership Team and we were ready for a new phase in the company's history.
And then.... the Great Recession began. Instead of growing the business, one of the first challenges for our Leadership Team was downsizing the company.
We very quickly went from 140 employees to 84 in one year. After the recession we saw accelerated growth... but plateaued around the same pre-recession headcount.

I had an “ah-ha” moment – there must be some point of constraint that kept us from growing past that point.

What needed to happen to get the company growing again?
I challenged the Leadership Team with a 2020 Vision – to double the size of the company in five years. The team and I got to work and together figured out the points of constraint. As a result, a new regional structure was created and Regional VPs were put in place. We moved to a Doer-Seller culture that we call the ORC Ambassadors Program.

And, we further diversified by expanding. We added Richie McNally as VP of ORC Utility and Infrastructure Land Services in 2014 and this year, we started a new division for Disaster Planning, Response and Resiliency with a dedicated VP – Joyce Kirk.
As our company grew to having offices in more than 20 states, the challenge became maintaining a unified culture – one that's been built over 50 years. Our approach was to define our values:

- Initiative
- Respect
- Knowledge
- Integrity
- Social Responsibility
Then we took it a step further and defined 25 Fundamentals that describe the behaviors that represent our values. We call it “The ORC Way”.

- Initiative
- Respect
- Knowledge
- Integrity
- Social Responsibility

- Be Vigilant
- Do the Right Thing, Always
- Do What’s Best For The Client
- Invest In Relationships
- Honor Commitments
- Practice Blameless Problem-Solving
- Listen Generously
- Speak Straight
- Find A Way

- Create Win-Win Solutions
- Embrace Diverse Perspectives
- Get Clear On Expectations
- Assume Positive Intent
- Be Ruthless About Excellence
- Pay Attention To The Details
- Look Ahead And Anticipate

- Lead By Example
- Think Team First
- Show Meaningful Appreciation
- Be Adaptable
- Embrace Change
- Take Intelligent Risks
- “Bring It” Every Day
- Be A Fanatic About Response Time
- Make A Difference
- Think And Act Like An Owner

inspiring confidence in progress...
And it's more than just bullet points. Here you can see the full content behind #6 – Practice Blameless Problem-Solving.

This level of detail provides clarity to our employees and our clients about the behaviors we expect to see in our Ambassadors.
I’m proud to share that we will achieve our 2020 Vision this year (2019) – one year ahead of schedule! I’d like to thank the team that led the charge. They are here with me today, including my daughter, Karen Ammar who serves as the Chairman of the Company.
Now I’d like to share some thoughts on leadership. I call it my 4-3-2- Plan for Success.

I hope as leaders in your organizations, you’ll find something that will be useful.

It is 4 qualities, 3 abilities and 2 guiding principles that have been important to me as a leader.
The four qualities are:

1. Perseverance is more important than any other quality in a strong leader. Perseverance is the difference between success and failure. I have always said that our biggest successes have often come five minutes after I was ready to give up. They key is that I did not give up and my team didn’t give up. We persevered.

2. Optimism is the second most important quality. Henry Ford said it best - “Whether you think you can... or think you can't... you're right.”

3. Intuition is really important in this era of information. We have so much information today and it changes fast. You have to be able to make timely decisions, sometimes in the absence of all of the data you would like to have. Sometimes a timely decision is more important than a perfect one. Forbes media published an article this year stating that “Intuition is the highest form of intelligence.” So, don’t short-change your intuition!

4. Empathy is the fourth quality. People skills are the most important skills you can have, because most of your issues as a leader will be people issues, not technical issues. A good leader will take responsibility when things go wrong and give their team credit when things go right.
The three abilities are:

1. The ability to accept responsibility.
2. The ability to accept risk.
3. And, the ability to focus on the future. A leader must have the patience and vision to focus on projects that will not be completed for many years.
And my two guiding principles are....

#1 - Never make a decision based on fear.

If you notice yourself thinking .... “I'm afraid that won't work” just stop and rethink your position. Most people never achieve their full potential because they are afraid of failure, afraid of the cost, of what people may say, afraid of change and sometimes even afraid of succeeding.

And #2 - Avoid negative energy. When you are a leader, you don’t have energy to waste on negative energy. You can make a conscious decision to avoid negative energy and you can practice this every day when waiting in line at the grocery store or when you are sitting in traffic.
That’s my 4-3-2 Plan for Success.

Each of you is a leader in your organization. I encourage you to consider the unique qualities and abilities you have that you can nurture to be successful as a leader – as well as your personal guiding principles.

I want to emphasize that the pace of change in technology, in business and in the world today is so fast that we need leaders who can inspire confidence in progress.
Do you ever think things are changing so fast you can’t keep up?

I really like an illustration that Tony Seba, the author of a presentation you can find on YouTube that he calls “Clean Disruption.” In this presentation he compares these two photos.

In this photo taken on 5th Avenue in New York City on Easter Sunday in 1900 – the street is filled with horses and carriages with just one car.
Just 13 short years later, again on Easter Sunday on 5th Avenue in New York City, you can see there is just one horse among the cars. This is an example of what Tony Seba calls disruptive technology.

He goes on to say that today we are in a period of clean disruption for both energy and transportation. I encourage you to view his presentation.

We’re definitely in a time of fast paced change and now – more than ever – we need leaders who can inspire confidence in progress.
We’re so proud of what we have accomplished in the last fifty years. We are proud to be part of this group and part of the progress we’ve all been involved in.

As we celebrate our 50th anniversary, I can’t help but be excited for what the next 50 years has in store for our organizations and for AASHTO. Together, let’s keep inspiring confidence in progress!

Thank you.