



IREM® From the Front Lines Podcast

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Episode 6.11

8/19/25 Release

More than a scholarship: Stories that built careers

Erin:

Welcome to another edition of From the Front Lines, where we discuss both the day-to-day, and one-of-a-kind issues facing real estate managers. In this episode, IREM Foundation's Senior Development Manager, Dana Gudel, talks to Maria Jordan, Janie Vasques, and Ed Peguero about the impact of IREM Foundation scholarships on IREM members' careers. Over to you, Dana.

Dana:

What happens when someone believes in your potential? In this inspiring episode, we hear directly from three scholarship recipients on behalf of the IREM Foundation, and each of these recipients are from a region supported by a top donating chapter. All who share how that support changed the course of their careers. From first generation professionals to career changers and rising leaders, each guest reveals how a single scholarship did more than cover costs. It opened doors, built confidence, and created lasting connections. These are the stories of ambition met with opportunity and of how the IREM community lifts its future leaders. So welcome to my guests, and first I would love if you could each tell us a little bit about yourself, including your name, city or chapter, and what year or when did you receive your scholarship? Maria, do you want to start?

Maria:

Absolutely. Thank you so much for having me. I'm so excited to be here. My name is Maria Jordan and I live in Atlanta, Georgia. I currently serve as the DEI Chair or Co-Chair for the IREM Georgia chapter. I was honored to receive the 2025 Robert K. and Gladys M. Beal Legacy Scholarship and it has been an awesome journey since I got this opportunity.

Dana:

Awesome. Thanks. Hey, Edgar, over to you.

Ed:

Hi. Well, maybe not as exciting as what she just said I got the scholarship, I've gotten it a couple times actually, more recently in the last several months and again last year, but just on my pursuit to my CPM®, which has been a slower journey, but it's still there and I'm still shooting for it. I'm not sure if you know Chris Mellen. Well, he was.

Dana:

Oh, yeah.

Ed:

Well he was, 20 years ago, believe it or not, he was my teacher. When I first got into real estate management, my first thing was to go for my ARM® and I was 34 years old and he was my teacher and just total coincidence. He happens to be the director of this company, Simon Companies, and his title's changed a couple times, but I believe it is director. But he, we tease each other all the time. He remembers me when I had a lot of hair and I remember and I tease him about 20 years ago, so. But it's been an interesting journey so far.

Dana:

I love that. And Chris Mellen is our 2025 IREM Foundation president. So full circle moment there. I love that. Hi, Janie. Welcome.

Janie:

Hi, yes, my name is Jeannie Vasques. I am based in Houston. I currently serve as the vice chair of the IREM Houston Chapters Community Involvement Committee. I've been really fortunate enough to receive three different scholarships during my journey, and I feel like it's important to list them all to show them recognition as they have supported me in my growth. So in 2023 I received the Donald M. Furbush Scholarship CPM® IREM Foundation Scholarship. Then in 2024, I was incredibly honored to be one of the first to receive the IREM Foundation's Women in Leadership Scholarship, which was a huge moment for me, especially since the program supports women stepping into leadership roles. And most recently this year, I was awarded the Robert K. and Gladys M. Beal Legacy Scholarship. And yeah, I've just been very fortunate. So I really appreciate it. But yeah.

Dana:

Amazing. Well, thank you all for being here. I would love to kind of take us back to the start of your careers and I would love to hear what brought you to real estate management and were there any challenges you faced early on in your career and how did you find IREM and decide to apply to a scholarship? Would love to hear all about your journey with us.

Maria:

Awesome. Well, my journey into real estate management began nearly 20 years ago, actually over 20 years now. I started as a leasing consultant in Washington, DC, where I'm originally from, and I fell in love with the impact we have on people's lives by providing homes and just creating community. So early in my career, I did face challenges with confidence. And then at that time, navigating a male-dominated industry and finding mentors who look like me was a challenge. So when I discovered IREM, I immediately saw the value of its education, support, and the sense of belonging it offers. And that inspired me to not only apply for the scholarship, but also to take advantage of the network. So I was blessed with the opportunity to be a DISI leader several years ago, and I also was blessed with the opportunity to be nominated for an award. So it's just been a lot of opportunity for me. And so I again, I'm just happy to be a part of such a growing and impactful network.

Dana:

Love it. What about you, Ed?

Ed:

Well, my journey sort of begins a very long time ago, about 30 something years ago. I was into my 20s. I was in the IT field and I ended up working for the local housing authority. I spent a few years there, I went off to the Air Force, I come back and the Director of Management approaches me and

said, "hey, Ed, I know you're into all this computer stuff, but how would you like to manage some properties as well? You keep talking about property management." And I said yeah, because I saw on TV on Oprah a long time ago, Charles Givens on Oprah, how he made his millions through real estate. But I loved computers. So I said I'll put them together, I'll study computers and to put the money into real estate and go in that direction. I don't know details, but that's what I had in my mind when I was like 13 or 14. Life takes you through different paths. My parents, when they came to this country, my brother, they never bought, my parents didn't buy a house until I was a teenager, of course, even though they had come in the 60s. And of course come there comes costs that are unanticipated. So they approached us. I have two brothers and a little sister and my older brother, myself, we decided, okay we're going, we're going to help mom and dad and go to work. My little brother decided to skadoodle. Is that the word? And he moved out and moved in with his girlfriend, didn't want to help with anything, my sister was too young. But fast forward, I ended up eventually getting into the computer field and in my late 20s, in my early 30s actually when I came back from boot camp, I actually took him up on getting into the property management side of it. And that didn't pan out as good. So I decided to leave the Housing Authority and go on my own way. And that was 2004 when I went for my ARM® and met Chris Mellen. And I went in that direction. My first job, assistant manager, it was for, what was the company? It was Win. Win Management. You know, he's a distant cousin. Arthur is a distant cousin of Mr. Simon, actually. But I ended up four years in Charlestown, right outside of Boston, and it was quite a learning experience, I'll tell you that. And then it's gone from there. It's gone from there. Eventually ended up here at Simon Companies.

Dana:

Fantastic. What a great story. Janie, how about you?

Janie:

So I feel like or from what I've heard that kind of many of us kind of just fall into real estate management, like not many actually set out to be part of this world. And originally I was just looking for an administrative office job because I knew I wanted to be part of the corporate world. So through a temp agency, I landed in a commercial real estate or in commercial real estate and I've stuck with it ever since. Early on, I feel like one of the biggest challenges I faced was the generational gap in the workplace and just having different viewpoints on things and figuring out how to navigate that. I also felt like I wasn't really going anywhere at the time. There weren't many opportunities to grow. So I eventually went back to my agency and they placed me with Transwestern. And honestly, it was a breath of fresh air. It felt like a much better fit for me. And that's actually where I was first introduced to IREM through them, Transwestern, pushing me to apply for the Future Leaders program. And from there I started learning about all the designations and certifications, and to me, they look like really powerful accomplishments. I saw it as a path to grow professionally and deepen my knowledge, and that's what motivated me to start applying for IREM scholarships, I wanted to keep learning and work toward the certifications and those IREM scholarships have absolutely helped make that possible.

Dana:

I love that. And that's a great transition into the next question I had, which was how did the scholarship affect the course of your career? Did it play a part in any achievements like getting your certification, promotions that you received, even within your IREM chapters, are you more involved or more aware and just getting involved on a local level? Would love to hear kind of how you're all giving back.

Maria:

Yeah, for sure. The scholarship, definitely, like Janie said, opened doors for me to pursue certifications that have really elevated my leadership skills, my credibility in the industry, and it also kind of deepened my involvement with IREM. IREM, particularly in my role, and how I can pour into others the way IREM has poured into me. So mentoring, advocating, and just creating pathways for the next generation. So one of the things I did this year was I wanted to look into us joining panels for student career festivals or career fairs, things like that. So I had an opportunity to do that with one of the career fairs here in Georgia, join a panel and introduce the students to IREM and what we have to offer and offer mentorship and just really, it just opened doors for me to be able to elevate and not to mention it's on my resume. And so and so yes, I would say most likely just being involved with a company or excuse me, an organization that has such a great reputation, adding that to my resume, I was just promoted as a director here with Cortland. And I'm sure that type of information and that type of involvement has definitely impacted my growth for sure.

Dana

Amazing. Congratulations on the promotion.

Maria

Thank you. Thank you so much.

Dana:

Ed, what about you?

Ed:

Well, I learned the power of scholarships, when I first got into the industry, I was recipient of Sallie Mae's First in my Family Scholarship. It was myself and I believe it was a young lady going to Harvard. She was the only one in Massachusetts. We got, we each got that scholarship and it was because my father, he had gone to college in his country. But here in this country, I'm the first in my family to my older brother went halfway. He had to drop out and help the family. But I managed when I got into the industry at 34, I also I made a decision to get myself into college. I enrolled over here to in at Enticott College up in Beverly, Massachusetts, and I graduated from there in 2008, Cum Laude. So I was in education mode, put it that way. I had gotten my ARM® and fast forwarding to here as far as the scholarships, it has allowed me, like Maria said, put it on my resume, being able to see candidate on there. It's a very, it's a very pleasing sight and it does bring up topics, topics of conversation when people ask about it. And I've taken out some of these skills that I've learned through the various courses. And I've applied them to my personal holdings, my personal, I own multiple pieces of real estate and I've expanded on a personal level. So I try and balance the professional with the personal. So it's a slower path, but because it's like being bilingual, you you're doing two things at the same time. That's it. That's where I'm at now.

Dana:

Right. Fantastic. Love it.

Ed:

One last thing if I can throw in. When I came to work at this particular site, my assistant, unfortunately the previous manager, I don't know what happened there, but I saw that she was underutilized in her potential and I asked her for her resume. She had been new to the company, maybe 10 months, 11 months, and a lot of what she was doing wasn't part of her role. But sometimes bosses take advantage, you know, they sort of push it, push it on. And I corrected that

because something that sticks with me, not only because of the way I was raised, but part of the ethics and honesty. That's something that I believe in deeply. So I took her resume, I spoke to, I spoke to the regional, I said she's a good candidate for an ARM®, and we went through it and found it she today she has her ARM®. She's one of the best assistants that I could hope for. And life is good. And all those things, it's not just the piece of paper, it's what comes with it? The values that come with it, so.

Dana:

Wow, that's a great story and a great example of giving back to those around you too. Amazing. Thanks for sharing. Janie, what about you?

Janie:

Well, the scholarships really helped shape the direction of my career. Because of the support I received, I was able to earn my ACoM and I'm currently working toward my CPM®. When I first joined Transwestern, I was a property administrator and now I'm an assistant property manager on the path to hopefully becoming a property manager soon. So it's been a steady climb, but I know with IREM's resources and community have played a big role in giving me that confidence and knowledge to grow. So in terms of giving back, that's actually become really important to me. I currently serve as vice chair of the IREM Houston's Community Involvement Committee. And it's a role I'm really proud of because it gives me the chance to help plan, you know, meaningful service events and encourage others to get involved in ways that make a difference. So that's really important and I think when you receive support like IREM has given me, it naturally makes you want to pay it forward, whether it's through volunteering or supporting new members or, you know, just being a resource to others. I'm always looking for ways to give back to the same community that has helped me find my voice and direction because I'm pretty shy and with IREM, IREM has really helped me network and I've gained friends, acquaintances, you know, so. I just want to give back. Like when people are interested in IREM, I'm like, yes, come here, let's, let's go IREM! Yes, you'll be so comfortable. Like, I don't know, it's just, it's given me just a level of confidence and. comfortability. Yeah That's it.

Dana:

Love it. Yay, wonderful. Go team IREM, right? Love it.

Dana Gudel 18:03

That's beautiful. Thank you. Thanks so much for sharing. I've got a quick one next. What is one piece of advice you would give someone who is thinking about applying for an IREM Foundation scholarship? Maria, what about you?

Ed:

Absolutely.

Maria:

Just do it. Don't second guess yourself. I mean, we deserve to invest in ourselves and our growth and be able to share your story. And I think you just got to do it. You have to. Put into yourself and take the first step.

Dana:

Amazing. What about you, Ed?

Ed:

I totally agree with what Maria said. I have to repeat what she said. Just do it because I found that when I would procrastinate and a lot of times and some of it's true. Sometimes you have a lot of work on your desk and you can't really take the time to go and apply and then take the class because you have a lot that you're going through professionally, but when you do it and you put aside some of the things that in reality you could postpone for an extra month or an extra couple of months to take a course or what have you, it pays off. You get the satisfaction. You come home, I go home and I have this big smile on my face. What? What happened today? I finished that class or, you know, a couple days later I passed the test. That kind of thing happens. And sort of, you know, you puff up your chest a little bit and then my parents are elderly and I'll swing by there and I'll tell my mom and my dad and they'll say the same thing. They'll say the same thing. My wife by them or they'll be like, we're so proud of you. And every time that happens, it's a little dopamine rush. So until the next time.

Dana:

As it as it should be, yeah, it's a big achievement. What about you, Janie?

Janie:

Same, do it. Absolutely apply. However when you do apply, be your authentic self. I think sometimes we get so focused on sounding perfectly polished or really professional that we forget to show who we really are. You know, professionalism, of course, is important. But with IREM, what really stands out is your passion, your story. I mean, this is what the podcast is about, our story and our willingness to grow. I will say though, competitiveness does drive me a little. I sometimes strive to be the best of the best. But what I've learned through IREM is that success doesn't have to come at the expense of authenticity. You don't have to pretend to have it all figured out. Just show up as yourself, be honest about your goals and be open to learning. What I've gotten with IREM is a community that supports growth, not perfection, and they truly value people who are willing to put in the work while staying true to who they are. And there's something very special and important to me and that's why I enjoy being part of IREM so much.

Dana:

I love that. And speaking of growth and goals and kind of looking up ahead, I would love to hear what's next in your journey. You've gotten the scholarship, you're on your way and your path to some certifications. What's next? Maria, what's next for you?

Maria:

Well, I'm definitely continuing my certification path, pursuing my CPM® designation and expanding my leadership, both within my organization and through IREM. So I'm passionate about helping people, helping women, helping people of color see themselves in this industry and step into leadership roles. So I'm going to continue to network and continue to take advantage of all that comes with being a part of something so big.

Dana:

Love it. What's next for you, Ed?

Ed:

Well, I'm going for my CPM®. Once I have that, then, you know, I have no plans on going anywhere. I love where I work. I'm real close to my house, my dogs, my other house, my parents, my relatives, my friends. I'm close to everything. You know, another 20 minutes south I'm in Boston, so I'm

happy where I am. But any opportunities that show up within Simon Companies, I'm more than happy to explore. I've had the opposite experience from Maria's. I've been surrounded mostly by women in this industry, with exception to maintenance and a couple of the bigwigs. That's about it. 80% have been, most of my regionals in the last 20 some, 20, 21 years have been my regionals, my managers, they've all been female for the most part. I'd say 98% of them, and I'd say half of them were of color. And that's fine. For me, as long as they do the job and they do it well and they're a good boss or they're a good assistant or they're a good peer, I'm all happy. I'm happy as clams, you know. Technically, my parents came from Dominican Republic originally, so, I use my Spanish, you know, with the tenants occasion. My building is half Russian/Ukrainian, 40% Latin American 10%, the rest of us are, you know, American, I guess. So I love learning from the tenants themselves but that's my experience. A little bit of everything.

Dana:

Love it. Janie, what's next for you?

Janie:

Well, obviously earning my CPM®, that's a big, big goal of mine that I've been working toward and I'm excited to keep growing in that direction. I am an assistant property manager, so I hope to officially step into a property manager role in the near future. From the moment that I joined IREM, I knew I wanted to one day become President of the Houston chapter. So that might sound bold, but it just shows the impact that IREM has had on me. And from the very beginning, as soon as I joined the Future Leaders programs and got an understanding of what it's about. It's like, yeah, I want to be president of the Houston chapter. So long term, I know that's going to be a journey, but at some point, hopefully to become President of the IREM Houston chapter.

Dana:

That's incredible. Well, we're cheering you on, and we're cheering for all of you in your CPM® journey. Ed, do you have something to add?

Ed:

Just real quick, after you reach that goal, there is a Japanese chapter I've heard, a chapter in Japan. So that's the ultimate, in my opinion.

Dana:

Love it. Okay I've got one final question to wrap up today's conversation. I would love to hear one word that you would use to describe what the scholarship meant to you. To try to keep it just to one word, Maria, what do you have?

Maria:

Geez, that is hard. I am a chatty Patty, but I would say one word: empowerment.

Dana:

Beautiful. Ed, do you have something?

Ed:

Oh, I'm just trying to just think of the words in English. Yeah, encompassing.

Dana:

Encompassing. Love it.

Ed:

Yes, it encapsulates a career, segments of a career, and the future. So it encompasses everything and you can throw whatever you want in there to be encompassing for you. You can personalize it, encompass it.

Dana:

I love it. Janie, what about you?

Janie:

Well, Maria took my word. I thought empowering as well, but I would say inspiring.

Dana:

Love it. Beautiful. Well, this was an inspiring conversation. I learned so much about you all and just want to thank you so much to Maria, Ed and Janie for just being so open about your journey and to our donors and IREM chapters who make their stories possible. So it's amazing to see how truly one scholarship can do so much more than just cover the costs of a course. It can spark confidence, open doors, and help someone realize what they're capable of. So if you're thinking about applying for a scholarship, we hope this gave you a little push. To, like everyone said, just do it. And if you're one of those generous supporters behind these opportunities, we want to say thank you. You are truly making a difference. Thanks so much for being here, everybody.

Ed:

Thank you.

Maria:

Thank you.

Janie:

Thank you.

Erin:

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