

Why I'm running for NSPS President-Elect

By Glen Thurow

Bring me men to match my mountains
Bring me men to match my plains
Men with empires in their purpose
And new eras in their brains

-Sam Walter Foss, *The Coming American**

We are competing for the future. This is a fact whether we as surveyors choose to acknowledge it or not. I also believe we have the opportunity to shape our destiny. In this respect I am hopeful but not naïve. Our biography is not our destiny. It's important to know the difference between yesterday and tomorrow. Surveyors need to create their future or it will be created for them. This is why I'm running for NSPS President-Elect; to help shape that future; to develop an organizational point of view about tomorrow's opportunities and build an organizational structure capable of exploiting them.

Professional entropy is no match for inspired innovation. The challenge before us is to identify and articulate a vision that encompasses new beginnings; new purposes; new eras. Like the pioneers in Foss' seminal work, we need to arrive bursting with the present tense with an eye towards tomorrow. We must develop a deep and bounding curiosity about the possibilities before us. This is not mindless optimism but a realization that our best days as a growing, dynamic profession lie ahead if we accept the challenge.

So where do we start? In a recent article by Thomas Frey entitled *The Futurist: 101 Endangered Jobs by 2030*, surveying is listed as a job that may disappear in the future. Frey cites the advent of Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs) as the reason opining that UAVs will do the work that surveyors do now. Of course, this is nonsense. Anyone remotely connected with boundary surveying knows that the expertise required will not be supplanted by a UAV. Last time I looked, UAV's understanding of boundary law was fairly scant. Certainly, surveyors will utilize this blooming technology to their benefit. But so will other spatial disciplines. Terrestrial and airborne 3-D LiDAR scanning, Building Information Modelling (BIM) and GPS, to name but a few technological advances, have brought GIS and mapping to widespread use across a wide spectrum of professions. Many land use decisions will be made by non-surveyors based on spatial data acquired by these means. This will accelerate in the coming years. I need not recite the litany in this regard. We have heard it for years. Boundary will always be with us. But other activities traditionally performed by surveyors will be done by others as well. So I would like to modify Mr. Frey's prognostication to this: Technology is changing what has here-to-for been called surveying. By 2030 surveying will still be around but radically different from where it is today. We will be diminished. Revenues will fall. Well qualified students will seek other career paths. This is already evidenced by the rapidly falling numbers for the Fundamentals of Surveying exam.

This holiday season as I watched Dickens' Christmas classic *Christmas Carol*, I was reminded of the notion that our future can be altered by changes we make today. We are not destined to travel a preordained path. How, then, shall we change our path?

*You can substitute "women" in Sam's verse with great authenticity, for pioneers and surveyors.

First, let's create space for dissent and dialogue. It seems to me that some new ideas are automatically dragged down dark alleys to be strangled without given due consideration. Let's agree to explore and consider different perspectives without reverting to ad hominem attacks as evidenced by some recent articles and "Letters to the Editor" in our trade magazines. It sometimes seems that you either toe the party line or face ridicule. Not every idea is a keeper, but the hallmark of an intelligent mind is to be able to entertain a thought and then accept it if we think it has merit or reject it if it doesn't pass our personal muster.

Second, we need to have a big tent. Everyone should be welcomed and encouraged. Women, minorities, foreign educated- there's room for all. That does not mean everyone should obtain licensure. Our licensing standards should never be lowered. You will not be called a surveyor unless you meet these standards. But there are great, well-paying careers in surveying that do not require licensure. Here is an admission that some of you may identify with yourselves. I'm not the world's greatest surveyor. Heck, I'm not even the best surveyor in Albuquerque. But I've been successful because I've surrounded myself with top notch people who compliment my abilities and supplement my knowledgebase. With one exception, they were not surveyors. I'm a mentor and educator. I identified people with the qualities I needed and hired them. They had heads on their shoulders and I let them use them. I offered guidance and encouragement. It works. Every licensed surveyor should consider themselves a mentor and actively fulfill that role in whatever capacity they are able.

Related to this is education. I support the concept of the Model Law Surveyor as defined by the NCEES Model Rules for professional licensure. But an ABET accredited four-year degree is not the only educational venue available, and in some circumstances, not the best use of an individual's time and talents. As I mentioned earlier, there are great careers in surveying that don't require licensure. Two-year technical degrees are an excellent way to obtain top-notch skills that will continue to be in demand by the spatial industry. The NSPS Certified Survey Technician program is another way to acquire sought after skills and abilities. Increasingly, online venues such as MOOCs and webinars in surveying are available. All of these are possibilities for preparing for the future.

Next, let's identify some skills we must have for the future. In his article, Frey identified three which I agree will be instrumental in charting our course forward: adaptability, flexibility, and resourcefulness. We must be able to adapt to changing circumstances and influence their direction. Rigid responses to constantly changing dynamics will lead to marginalization in the marketplace. If we attempt to do business in the next ten years the way we did business the last ten years we may not be around. We must be flexible and able to rapidly respond to opportunities to create new revenue streams. Finally, resourcefulness. Life coach Anthony Robbins defines resourcefulness as having the elements of creativity, determination, curiosity, passion, resolve, and caring. The resources at our disposal are time, money, technology, contacts, experience, and management. Of all of these I place great emphasis on enlightened, effective management. To this I would add servant leadership sometimes referred to as leadership with a small "L".

Which brings me full circle concerning why I'm running for NSPS President-Elect. I believe our national organization is the best vehicle to effectuate positive change and to help shape our collective future. If elected, the progression is from president-elect to president to past-president. This affords the opportunity to influence the direction of the national organization over three years. Much can be accomplished. Much needs to be accomplished. Our future awaits. Δ
