



President's Angle

Earl F. Burkholder, PS, PE

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In the September 2009 column, I promised to speculate on what surveying professionals might do to ensure the continued viability of the surveying profession. In a word, "participate." I have no crystal ball, but I fully anticipate that the future of surveying lies between two extremes – as a profession, surveying will not go away but neither will surveying ever arrive at that state of perfection we all dream about. If we can agree that our individual participation is more important than some nebulous state of perfection, then I am optimistic that our professional journey can be more satisfying for us as individuals than if we assume the role of a critical cross-country spectator who chides the runners for not trying hard enough. I believe the profession will ultimately benefit the most from that collection of persons who participate and give it their best effort.

Maybe I should practice what I preach. The following is a story but it contains some truth. I'm sure you'll get the point. I and my family have moved a number of times in which we were new to the community. With each such move, the issue comes up as to what church we should attend. It is interesting to visit various congregations and to get a feel of community/dedication/service and other attributes. We've made the observation that it really is difficult to find the perfect church. But, guess what, one day we found it. What a joy. Then, following up on several visits and discussions we decided to join "the perfect church." My, my, can you imagine our disappointment when we then came to realize that this perfect church was not so perfect after all – like us, people there also had foibles. Humm. . . No organization or group of humans is perfect!

Once aware of the imperfections, it becomes easy to just quit attending and/or to become uninvolved. Is that the attitude we take with our profession? If the group or organization does not do what we want or does not embrace the values we hold important, then we feel justified in taking our "business" elsewhere. Wait! Stop right there! Now ask, "In such a case, who loses?" In terms of what does not happen, both sides tend to lose and ultimately status quo degenerates into mediocrity.

That may be overstating the case. After all, the churches of which I never became a member seem to get along just fine without me. But, the point of this column is to focus on what can happen when we do get involved. I really do not know the answer, but let's speculate a bit. Any organization thrives on the

attitudes and actions of its members. A supportive attitude and active participation are essential for vitality and growth. The organization and the individual are both invigorated by active participation. Joining any organization and just paying the dues and/or getting ones name on a membership roster may be justified but, without active participation, mediocrity will flourish like weeds in an untended garden. The organization and the individual member both benefit to the extent one becomes actively involved. The saying goes, "What is in it for me?" The answer is "nothing" unless you become involved.

Such parallels could be taken too far. But, if there is benefit or inspiration to be drawn from the analogy, then I've achieved my objective. Quite simply, the surveying profession needs you. We all have a contribution to make, if it's none other than offering a sympathetic ear or a word of encouragement to others. Too often, it is easy to be judgmental as we compare our own circumstance with that of others. What good does that accomplish? The temptation is to build a self-image or a reputation on the foibles of others. I submit that is short-sighted and self-defeating. We need to develop a vision and decide what it is we really want (that is an entire separate column but, for now I would ask each reader to visit the NMPS web site and read our mission). Once that vision is in place, many creative individuals will do those things that contribute to the good of the group without being told to do so or without expecting accolades for services rendered. We do it because it is the right thing to do and our contribution, even though it may be small, contributes to the well being of the organization.

Following is a restatement of the question posed in the September issue. What can or should surveying professionals do to ensure continued viability of our profession? Should we hunker down and focus primarily on the boundary issues or should we open up the profession and embrace others who, although they may do extensive work with spatial data, might not have the background, insight, or motivation to understand real surveying. Is it possible or desirable to have it both ways?

OK, I did not answer my own question but I attempted to lay the ground-work for additional discussion. A sharper vision and renewed professional identity will emerge as we trade ideas, share experiences, and offer encouragement to each other. In so doing, each voice deserves to be heard – if offered as a sincere contribution to the profession. But, it is also true that naysayers, even if their point is valid, tend to be ignored.

In the next President's column I hope to comment on the surveying body of knowledge, cause and effect, and "connecting the dots" with regard to promoting a broader view of what it is surveying is and does. But, it probably comes as no surprise that I see surveying as part of a larger collection of spatial data professionals. I also believe the surveying profession can make a huge contribution in that arena and that we can prosper, both financially and on the satisfaction scale. The opportunities are endless and exciting. Δ

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