



Editorial

THE American Surveyor

A FOOT IN THE PAST... AN EYE TO THE FUTURE

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Info-packed Conferences

The 13th annual **GeoTech** conference was held again at NOAA headquarters in Silver Spring, Maryland. Sponsored by the Potomac Chapter of ASPRS in cooperation with NGS, this conference is always information-packed and features high-level industry and federal government agency speakers. This year was no exception.

Not surprisingly, several of this year's presentations revolved around lessons learned from the recent natural disasters

in our country. It was refreshing to listen to speakers who didn't resort to the typical mudslinging and blame-fixing that has been oozing from the media and opposing political parties these past few months. Instead, they soberly discussed what went right and what went wrong. It is perplexing that even though 9/11 revealed weaknesses in inter-agency infrastructures across the country, as demonstrated in New Orleans, apparently there are still many jurisdictions that have yet to solve such problems.

Each state, of course, has a unique set of challenges. The State of Maryland, for example, has instituted a program that deals with interoperability between agencies. In 2003, Maryland Governor Robert Ehrlich established policies to standardize communication by establishing data standards. Tools were created and secure levels were defined to control data access. As an example of preparedness, census data has been used to identify "special populations" likely to be dependent on public transportation. And meeting grim realities head-on, also identified were ice-skating rinks that could be used as temporary morgues, and quarries that could be used for bomb disposal. Likewise, critical facilities such as prisons and nursing homes were pinpointed. More can be found about the two systems, EMMA and MEGIN, at www.marylandgis.net/interoperability.

NGS Director Charlie Challstrom discussed the success NOAA had with the rapid collection of aerial imagery. Events such as the Florida hurricanes, after which a half million images were downloaded,

Geoff Jacobs, Sr. VP, Product Mgmt & Mktg,
Leica Geosystems HDS



highlight the need for partnerships. For Katrina, NOAA turned to its list of pre-qualified subcontractors. But when nobody from this group could respond quickly enough, NOAA put its own plane in the air to rapidly acquire 5,500 images—including 1,400 lineal miles of shoreline. Insurance companies and people looking for their own houses downloaded 40 Terabytes of imagery. More than 2,000 images were also taken of Hurricane Rita damage. Challstrom indicated that Google Earth and Global Explorer have created a public expectation for imagery. Challstrom emphasized that this is not the business NOAA wants to be in, but the urgent need arose for quick turnaround of imagery, and NOAA had a DSS aerial imagery system, so it moved ahead.

The next speaker, Karen Schuckman of URS, continued by discussing her company's FEMA contract. Partnering with companies like 3001 and 3Di, 12,000 square miles were flown. As yet another example of the difficulty of pulling this all off, Karen said that URS has a FEMA contract, but 3001 and 3Di did not. Both companies did have a contract with the COE, so COE made an arrangement with FEMA. Karen praised what she called "extreme cooperation" of this type. NOAA was just flying the coast, and critical information—for instance, HAZMAT imagery—was needed inland. Every time President Bush would visit, the airspace would be shut down. The aerial industry has shown that it can deliver imagery within 24 hours, but



Gavin Schrock, LS

with Katrina, the funding didn't arrive for three days.

In spite of all the criticism, we can be proud that industry responded quickly to these awful events. Katrina was the worst weather disaster our country has experienced in modern times, but lessons learned will certainly be applicable to future disasters.

More Meetings!

On the heels of GeoTech I jumped cross-country to participate in a very enjoyable **Surveyors Rendezvous** in Spokane. This year's event featured tales of explorers of the West and the usual reenactors (see photo). We learned much about Canadian explorer Alexander Mackenzie and his influence on Thomas Jefferson. Mackenzie had published a book about his explorations in 1801 and Jefferson obtained a copy before sending Lewis & Clark on their famous trek. Jefferson gleaned 25 "items of advice" from the book that he shared with Lewis & Clark to prepare them for what lay ahead. Look for a future article about the fascinating way in which the exploration of the West was intertwined with several famous explorers such as Mackenzie and David Thompson.

The worldwide **Trimble User Conference**—held October 23-26 in Las Vegas and attended by around 1,300 people—was another great conference. Not only do we meet a lot of new people at these events, we also get to see what's being done with the equipment. One of the speakers and organizers of this year's conference was Gavin Schrock (pictured). Schrock will write about it in a future issue. In the mean time, don't miss his article in this issue about sharing your profession with your kids!

The **Leica HDS User Conference**, held in San Ramon, California in early November, was equally fascinating for me (of course I can't leave out the lovely dinner cruise in San Francisco Bay!). When I first wrote about laser scanning in 1998, the ratio of field time to office time was 40:1. Currently, the ratio is 6-8 hours



(L-R) Rendezvous reenactors Bart Crattie, LS and Robert Cagle, LS (Check out Bart's article on the Surveying Merit Badge in this issue.)

in the office from one hour in the field, depending on the use of the data. The holy grail is obviously further reductions, and I believe this will happen. Look for a future article about this content-packed international conference as well.

Looking Back, Looking Ahead

This issue marks the second full year of publication for *The American Surveyor*. We would like to thank you—our readers and supporters—for your help in making the magazine a success. The many positive comments we receive on each new issue make it all the more fun to get started on the next one.

2005 has been a sobering year for our nation. We know that all the presents around a Christmas tree can't hold a candle to the presence of loved ones in our lives. In these days of increasingly vitriolic and polarized politics and our continued war effort in Afghanistan and Iraq, we want to thank our military men and women and their families for the self-sacrifices they make to extend the precious gift of freedom to others around the world. And following this year's unprecedented mud slides, wildfires, hurricanes, and the like, it's good to know that surveyors will help to move us forward in 2006, and play a vital role in the process of rebuilding lives and communities. *A*