



Editorial

>> Marc S. Cheves, LS

THE American Surveyor

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

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PUBLISHER Allen E. Cheves
allen.cheves@chevesmedia.com

EDITOR Marc S. Cheves, LS
marc.cheves@chevesmedia.com

ASSOCIATE EDITOR Joel Leininger, LS
ASSISTANT EDITOR Jacalyn Cheves

CONTRIBUTING WRITERS

Dan Beardslee, LS	Jeff Lock
Silvio A. Bedini	Dan Martin
Joseph Bell, LS	John Matonich, LS
Joe Bettit, LS	Jerry Penry, LS
J. Anthony Cavell, LS	Al Pepling, LS
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Wendy Lathrop, LS	Patrick Toscano, LS
Thomas Liuzzo, LS	Rj Zimmer, LS

The staff and contributing writers may be reached via the online Message Center at www.TheAmericanSurveyor.com.

GRAPHIC DESIGN LTD Creative, LLC

WEBMASTER Joel Cheves

ACCOUNT EXECUTIVE Richard Bremer
rich.bremer@chevesmedia.com

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Maps and Perspectives

Maps—they tell us where to go, they change our perspectives, they put us in our place (they sound like my wife!) As a magazine for surveyors, nearly every article we publish is associated with some form of mapping. This past September Jackie and I were pleased to help celebrate the opening of “Maps in Our Lives,” an exhibition that honors the 30-year partnership between the American Congress on Surveying and Mapping (ACSM) and the Library of Congress (LOC). I would like to thank Ilse Genovese, editor of the *ACSM Bulletin*, for sharing the following report on the exhibition with our readers:

Maps in Our Lives

Housed in the Geography and Map Division of the Library of Congress in Washington, D.C. is an awesome treasure trove of maps, globes, terrain models, and aerial photographs. More than 50 plats, charts, maps and other illustrations of measuring the earth—a small fraction of the LOC’s vast collection—as well as a two-minute GIS video loop, now make up “Maps in Our Lives,” a special exhibit in the Library’s Madison Building.

Surveying, cartography, geodesy and geographic information systems—the four constituent professions represented by ACSM—are represented in the exhibition. It begins with maps of George Washington’s farm, which demonstrate the various applications of surveying, from identifying general farm uses in 1760 to single subdivision lot surveys in 1999. Also included in the surveying section is a hydrographic survey map depicting the effects of underwater topography and water currents during a ship collision along the New Orleans Riverwalk. Then there is the two-minute video produced by the Environmental Systems Research Institute Inc. (ESRI), which illustrates the power and effectiveness of GIS in presenting and interpreting landscape over time. By overlaying the mid-17th and 19th century plats and maps of Washington’s original farm in Fairfax County, Virginia, with GIS data, the video provides a historical and spatial comparison of the land as it was and is now in the same portion of today’s Fairfax County.

The cartographic section of the exhibition consists of 40 items, largely

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Geography & Map Division**



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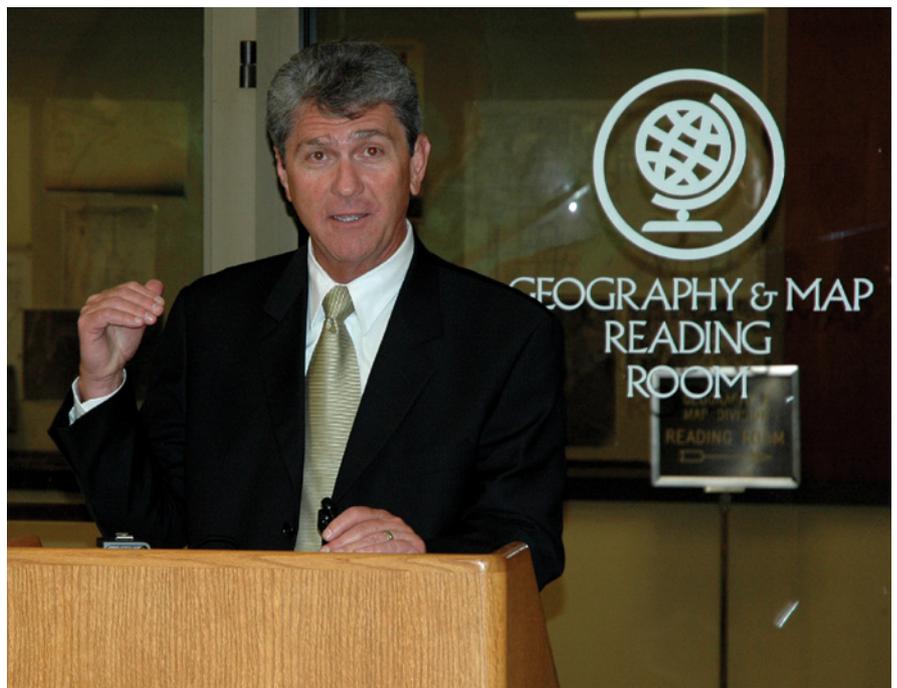


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Photos: Marc Cheves

ACSM Director Curt Sumner

selected from ACSM's annual map design competition. Its purpose is to demonstrate the wide variety of mapped information we daily encounter. On view are thematic maps (biodiversity in the Philippines, the incidence of hurricanes in the North Atlantic); maps produced for reference purposes (map of the U.S. Capitol for the visually impaired, a country profile of Iran produced by the CIA); recreation and travel maps (airline travel routes, a panoramic map of the North Cascades); and, last but not the least, maps used as illustrations in books and atlases (population distribution and annual precipitation).

Geodesy, the science concerned with measuring the size and shape of the earth and determining precise distances, directions, and differences in elevation between points on its surface, is, appropriately, depicted in the exhibit with a large map of the United States. The map is based on a survey that established the central reference point for later surveys. The survey was the first long-distance use of geodesy in America in 1871, and it was conducted along the 39th parallel arc that lies near the north-south center of the continental United States.

The entire exhibit underscores two major truths—maps are the end product of a survey, and they are one of man's oldest databases of geographic, cultural, and economic information.

Our dependence on spatial data in almost everything we think or do is over-

whelming. The emphasis today is on accurate data—the right information that will help us make the right decisions. Increasingly, in this age of information technology, we can be both users of and contributors of spatial data.

"Maps in Our Lives" is an endeavor which, like the survey along the 39th arc, ties the various pieces of the spatial information spectrum together. The exhibition would not have been possible without the generous support of many state surveying societies, a number of state and federal government organizations, and many loyal friends in the spatial data professions represented by ACSM.

Incidentally, mapping and its product, maps as enduring tokens of real value, was a common thread permeating the 20th Surveying Teachers Conference recently organized at Texas A&M in Corpus Christi. Coincidence? No. Those throughout the spatial data industry, from teachers to manufacturers, have come to the realization that in addition to providing service, the industry also provides information for decisions that may have far-reaching consequences.

"Maps in Our Lives" will be on view from 8:30 a.m. to 5 p.m., Monday-Friday, through Jan. 6, 2007. If you are planning a trip to Washington, D.C., in the coming months, don't miss it! It's a treat that will delight and inform the professional and the lay person alike.

—Ilse Genovese, Editor, ACSM Bulletin 