



Worried About The **Future of Surveying?**

Not a problem in Florida!

In my July/August 2007 editorial I wrote about a challenge that continually lies before us: attracting young people into surveying. Shortly after the magazine came out, I received a call from Marilyn Evers, the executive director of the Florida Surveying and Mapping Society (FSMS). She informed me that Florida has been doing exactly what I had advocated, and has been having great success. When she outlined what they are doing, I knew it was worth writing about, and paid them a visit in Tallahassee to find out more.

Many state societies have developed programs to attract new surveyors, including California, which has created a Hollywood-quality video. Most of the state societies have had scholarship programs for many years. Florida established their original scholarship foundation in 1968 and a new \$100,000 endowment was established in 2006. FSMS alone gives out

\$25-30K in scholarships each year, and in addition, maintains a healthy PAC Fund to assist with legislative/lobbying efforts,

NSPS has worked with NCEES to develop a speaker's kit that can be used when speaking to groups of young people. All in all, a great deal of effort is being expended across the country to address the challenge. But Florida has taken their effort to another level by, among many other things, hiring a recruiting coordinator whose sole responsibility is to reach out to young people to interest them in surveying as a career.

Prior to becoming the executive director, Marilyn started out part-time with FSMS in 1996. Her previous experience included thirteen years in human resources management in the banking industry. When she was hired, FSMS had less than 800 members. The group had weathered some difficult storms (the previous executive director had embezzled money from the society) and trust and support were at an all-time low. If the

>> By Marc Cheves, LS

society was to survive, it was going to have to grow. It was determined that the best way to grow the organization would be to add value for the membership.

Strengthening the Ties

The first step was to increase the amount of communication with the members. The 10-page newsletter, which was being outsourced, was brought in-house. In time it became a 44-page magazine, and in 2002, it won the NSPS Journalism Award. Today FSMS has two publications and a 1,500 person e-mail list, and the society corresponds extensively with the membership.

Next, they “took the show on the road” and began regular visits to the chapter meetings. Marilyn says these visits became pep rallies to encourage participation. After that, they brought the education program in-house and hired an education coordinator to work with the chairman of the education committee. The society uses volunteer and professional instructors. Two years ago they began an e-learning program—the first surveying and mapping association in the nation to do so. Input for the e-learning program comes from all three groups: the committee provides ideas, the instructors provide content, and the coordinator coordinates the activities.

Recruiting Revamped

In 2000, several years before the NSPS Speakers Kit became available, FSMS began a recruiting program by producing a 7-minute VHS video at a cost of \$4-5K. Chapters began embracing the efforts on the local level and in 2001, FSMS designed and purchased an attractive portable display that could be used at local high school job fairs and career days. By 2004, it was evident that a full-time staff person was needed to take recruiting to the next level, so a recruiting coordinator was hired. Steve Gordon, FSMS President at the time and a graduate of the UF Geomatics Program, provided valuable assistance to Marilyn in developing the program and getting it off the ground.

Initially a three-tiered program was developed for 1) recruiting students already enrolled in other programs at UF; 2) transferring community college graduates, and 3) steering high school students into the profession. The first



Marilyn Evers, Executive Director, Florida Surveying and Mapping Society

task was a revamping of the video and producing CDs to be distributed to students. A handout packet for students was also prepared that included scholarship opportunity information. Professors Dave Gibson and Bon Dewitt at the University of Florida (UF) in Gainesville also acted as advisors in the beginning stages. In addition, FSMS has a recruiting advisory committee, of which four members serve for the technical aspects.

A program specialist at the Florida Department of Education (FDOE) encouraged FSMS to work with the middle school counselors. FDOE has statistics documenting that lasting career impressions are formed during the middle school years. At that point the three-tiered program grew to four tiers. The FDOE also featured Careers in Geomatics in their bi-annual publication disseminated to all middle school students in Florida public schools. That was a tremendous breakthrough for the recruiting program.

An NSPS speaker’s kit was purchased for each chapter to further assist local efforts, and provisions were made for an instrument to be available at each presentation so students could have a hands-on

demonstration. UF’s high school GPA requirement is 4.0 for students with 13-59 transferable semester hours who seek to transfer in as freshmen and sophomores, and those slots are very limited. Since this is a challenge for some students, the focus on associate degree students transferring into the Geomatics Program at UF has been vital.

Today, recruiting coordinator Sarah Wason travels to all 28 community colleges in the state as well as the 21 FSMS chapters. Because the state encompasses 58,000 square miles, and because Sarah spends 40-50 percent of her time on the road, it was prudent for FSMS to purchase a vehicle for her use rather than renting one.

As part of the approach, Sarah works with the counselors and career advisors to introduce the profession, FSMS, and her role. Marilyn explained they soon learned that educating career counselors about the profession needed to be Step #1, and that the most common reaction received from academia was, “I never thought about encouraging a student to become a surveyor and mapper.” Furthermore, many in academia didn’t realize it is a profession (not a trade), that licensure in Florida



FSMS Staff: L-R, Stephanie Wehrly, Membership Coordinator; Amber May, Administrative Assistant; Marilyn Evers, Executive Director; Sarah Wason, Recruiting Coordinator; Kim English, Education Coordinator

requires a four-year degree, and that the Geomatics Program at UF has existed for over thirty years. Sarah also expresses to the career counselors the need for young people to enter the profession and stresses the opportunities, the scholarship availability, the guaranteed job placement and the competitive salaries: entry level people in Florida can make \$45-55,000 per year. I found it interesting when Marilyn said that within five years most graduates of the Geomatics Program are principals in their firms.

Recruitment efforts reach well beyond school settings. Sarah also attends teacher conventions and Parent Teacher Association meetings, all in an effort to introduce more people to surveying as a career. In addition, she works with the statewide 4H program and homeschoolers through the Florida Parent Educators Association (FPEA). The largest conference the recruiting coordinator works with is the FPEA conference that attracts more than 10,000 students and parents. And it works: within a year after hiring the recruiting coordinator, enrollment in the surveying program at Gainesville

doubled, and they are now seeking larger classrooms and more equipment. Marilyn said the equipment manufacturers and dealers have done a marvelous job of supporting the equipment needs of the program, and added that SouthernLaser had just donated a laser scanner to the program.

using swamp buggies, air boats, ATVs, boats and other outdoor gear. In other venues, FSMS provides a half-day workshop for the Boy Scout Surveying Merit Badge, and future plans include working with the Girl Scouts as well.

In 2006, FSMS sent a direct-mail to 1,219 high schools, providing posters

“...lasting career impressions are formed during the middle school years.”

Recruitment is not just for the professional track, but the technical track as well. Outreach extends to the CAD classes at Florida’s 32 vo-tech schools. High school students can take classes at the vo-techs while they are still in high school. And there’s an element of fun involving “Big Boys and Their Toys” included in the portable recruiting display: graphics that show surveyors

and information packets. Also in 2006, the University of Florida hired two more professors for the Fort Lauderdale and Tampa satellite campuses, and plans are underway for hiring a third professor for a campus in the Florida Panhandle. The goal is for no student to be located more than two hours from a campus. The University of Florida started using web-based learning in 2006, and is working with the society’s

sustaining firms to allow lab work to be completed at local individual firms rather than students having to travel to a campus. FSMS was awarded Affiliate of the Year by NSPS in 2006 for its recognition for recruiting efforts.

Last spring the society branched out in a new way, launching a \$25,000 radio ad campaign for the profession. The 45-second spot aired on Clear Channel stations in Florida, spreading the great news about career opportunities in surveying and mapping.

Measures of Success

I read in a recent FSMS newsletter that there has not been an increase in membership dues for the past seven years. Sustaining firm dues are \$250 per year, regular member dues are \$225 per year, and affiliates and associates pay

FSMS is a strong supporter of the CST program all the way down to the chapter and sustaining firm level, and Marilyn claims that Florida has the most CSTs of any state in the nation—27% which is 510 out of 1916. At some point, FSMS Board of Directors decided to stop supporting the Trig*Star program, determining that the money would be better spent on in-state recruiting.

Marilyn is a big proponent of the ACSM State Executives Forum that meets annually at the ACSM Conference. When she began attending there were usually five other state execs in attendance; last year there were 28. Participants learn by sharing; they also become proactive.

Another key to FSMS's success has been the support of the Board of Directors. Active and progressive, the

relies on the members communicating with the society: likes, dislikes, ideas," she says. "It's a two-way street, and the society needs feedback."

Not long after my visit to Tallahassee, FSMS hired Rachel Simpkins to be the Programs Coordinator. Marilyn explained the importance of such a position: "Two years ago I approached our president, telling him that we needed to bring more value to our chapter meetings and give our members more reason to attend their local monthly meetings. Chapters are the lifeblood of an association. The only way to accomplish that was to designate a portion of a staff person's time to working with all chapter presidents on a regular basis, assisting them in scheduling speakers for the meetings. In other words, it would have to be staff-driven to move forward. Our president got onboard with the idea and we implemented our Statewide Chapters' Rejuvenation Plan. At the end of the first year, we saw an overall attendance increase of 33% and we knew we were onto something good."

On a Personal Note

Marilyn's connection to surveying isn't limited to her professional career with FSMS. She has been married to well-known Florida surveyor Lamar Evers since 1969. Lamar was FSMS President from 1989-90 and then became the NSPS Governor, Secretary to the Board of Governors, Chairman of the Board of Governors and Area 4 Director. They have two children and two grandchildren. Their son, Justin, works for a private surveying/engineering firm in Tallahassee, has a four-year degree, and is in the process of completing his experience requirement to sit for his Florida exam for licensure. He is currently a Level II CST.

During my visit with Marilyn, I asked her for the secret of her success, she said it was the work ethic instilled in her by her parents. I was touched when she shared with me a copy of the tribute she presented at her father's funeral three months before. Highlighted were the words: *He was the very best "work ethic" model, teaching us that excelling required working harder than all the others and always giving our very best.* Words to live by. 

Marc Cheves is editor of the magazine.

"...within a year after hiring the recruiting coordinator, enrollment in the surveying program at Gainesville doubled."

\$75 per year. When Marilyn took over, there were less than 50 sustaining firms. Today there are 453. Under Marilyn's directorship, FSMS has grown from less than 800 members to more than 2,200 members. The 1,205 licensed members represent 38 percent of the total number of Florida licensees. FSMS has an unusual method of funding its lobbying efforts: those firms that want to can pay an extra \$50 a year to become members of their successful PAC. This money is not earmarked, but rather is used for whatever lobbying is needed.

As benchmarks of the society's success, Marilyn points to the enrollment in the Geomatics Program at Gainesville and the satisfaction of the sustaining firms from the increased availability of field and office technicians and potential licensees. Key to all this has been the realization that unless we can provide our country with enough surveyors, the likelihood of the government stepping in to help "supply the demand" increases.

Board understands that to make money, sometimes it has to spend money. They have supported Marilyn in her attendance and participation nationally, and are generous in their staff training budget for the six FSMS staff members. According to Marilyn, FSMS also has a great relationship with the Florida Department of Business and Professional Board of Professional Surveyors and Mappers, which is open to ideas and regularly seeks input from FSMS.

FSMS has become one of the most successful survey organizations in the country today by concentrating on communication with their members and providing value. They are securing the future of our profession by ensuring a steady supply of new surveyors. In addition to the normal technical sessions offered at the last conference, more than 30 extracurricular events were also available for participants to choose from.

I asked Marilyn what advice she would offer for other societies. "Success