



editorial



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Quo Vadis Surveying?

For more than 20 years I have used the magazines I've edited to promote technology. I've done this because I saw in my own career how technology saved time and made for a better work product. Plus which, it made the work more fun. Little did I know that this technology would result in damage to the surveying profession because of one simple fact: technology enables non-surveyors to do things for which you always had to get a surveyor.

Recently, the magazine has extensively covered the move by NCEES and the education community to open the floodgates to registration by eliminating the boundary surveying experience requirement. Granted, technology does enable non-surveyors, but the public continues to be protected by registration requirements that protect the average person's single biggest purchase, their land.

My sense so far is that this watering-down push will not go away. There are many reasons why the rights of property owners have evolved in our nation's history, and none of them have to do with watered-down test-taking or course-providing. In discussing the future with the magazine's panel of experts, the consensus seems to be that, with one exception, the stakeholders will be happy: NCEES will sell more exams, the schools will sell more courses, and the manufacturers will sell more gear. Besides the public, the only stakeholder that is at risk is the boundary surveyor. And of course, property owners will always want someone to hang the liability on.

Some have said that those who lack boundary experience are being shunned. Nothing could be further from the truth. It could be that separate licenses/certifications for all the rest will satisfy the first three stakeholders, but unless we are ready to abandon the current system and move to GIS coordinates for property corners which anybody can set, the public still needs boundary surveyors.

Our May issue contained an article by renowned surveyor and educator Dick Elgin. In his article, Dick reiterates the need, and indeed the demand, that real experience still be required to sit for the exam. I still believe that the architects and Canada have it right: for both, a period of apprenticeship under a licensed professional is required. Book learnin' is definitely necessary, but for the protection of the public, so is real experience. Also in the May issue, the new president of NSPS, Tony Cavell, cut to the heart of the matter as he examined ten reasons for why we are having trouble attracting new surveyors.

I still maintain that most of the problems can be solved by a decent land development economy, and with it, an increased demand for surveyors. Even in the midst of the worst economy since the early 1930s, look at the demand for surveyors that was created by the oil & gas activity in North Dakota and Montana. Granted, that demand has tapered off with the drop in the price for oil, but that's the nature of oil & gas industry.

Rest assured that we have not finished with this subject. While small businesses are buffeted by unilateral rule-making from Washington, the forces lined up against our profession seem to be following that direction. For example, the Idaho Board has already watered down the requirements to sit for an exam. In this issue, we have a rebuttal from NCEES to the John Stock Thought Leader that appeared in our March-April issue. But remember, it's not only up to us to resist, but more important, to suggest solutions. As Mike Pallamary says, it's going to take all of us to convince the public why the current system is in their best interests. ■