



## Editorial

>> Marc Cheves, PS



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# The New Normal

**T**he 2012 election is behind us, and the American people have decided to continue with the current administration. From a surveying perspective, it remains to be seen what impact this will have on commercial construction, however I'm encouraged to report that in some parts of the country residential construction is up nearly 20 percent from a year ago. Several years ago, I read a front page article in *USA Today* that claimed there was enough demand to continue residential construction at the current pace until 2029! Intuitively, I knew this was fantasy, but still took it as a sign that surveyors would be demanded for the foreseeable future.

Little did we know that the bursting of the housing bubble would decimate our ranks, and result in a four-year drought of land development surveying. The majority of surveying companies in our country were small businesses with less than 10 employees. These firms, especially if they were dependent on land development surveying, have been devastated. My mentor in Austin, Texas once had more than 150 projects per year. Last year he had less than 30, and had to drastically alter the way he does business.

Still, there remain some bright spots on the horizon. On the opposite page is a help wanted ad from SAM Inc., an Austin-based firm that has been wildly successful in the implementation of technology. But as is often the case of "overnight successes," this one wasn't. "Sam" is Samir Hanna, an Egyptian immigrant, whose hard work over the years has allowed him to take hold of the proverbial American dream. I knew Sam in the early 1980s when he was working for Espey Huston in Austin. He started SAM Inc. in 1994, but it wasn't until the last 3-4 years that the company really took off.

Today, the company is heavily involved in all geospatial disciplines—surveying, photogrammetry and aerial mapping, and GIS, as well as terrestrial, mobile and aerial LiDAR. Most recently, it has created a subsidiary—SAM CS—to handle construction services and subsurface utility engineering, and has even purchased a specialized truck to do the utility work.

My point in saying all this? For more than 15 years of magazine publishing, I have promoted measurement and positioning technology, in large part because I've always been fascinated by it. Beginning in the 70s, when electronics first started affecting our industry, we've watched as crew size dropped from four to three to two to one. The American Indians rightfully viewed the transit as "the thing that steals the land." We've watched as technology has slowly stolen our profession by allowing non-surveyors to do things that always required a surveyor.

I do not have a crystal ball, and even though I've always considered myself to be fairly sophisticated when it comes to recognizing trends and predicting the future, I was completely unprepared for the last four years. Who knows what the next four years will bring? Will the Mom & Pops continue to disappear? Will only the mid- and large-sized firms survive? It's obvious that these are the firms that are thriving today, in large part because they have looked out into the industry and correctly predicted its path. But more important, it's because they have eagerly adopted various forms of technology and adapted with the ever-expanding geospatial industry.

Where do we fit in? Where are we headed? Our new writer, Mike Pallamary, will be addressing these topics and more along with our many fine writers in future issues. As we begin our tenth year of publishing *The American Surveyor*, stay tuned for more on the New Normal. And as always, we enjoy and appreciate the responses of our readers, too.

In spite of the many challenges we face, we still live in the best country on earth. May God bless and direct your paths in the coming year. 