



## Guest Editorial

>> Gary Jeffress, Ph.D., PS



www.amerisurv.com

2013 Vol. 10 No. 9  
© Cheves Media LLC

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

**EDITOR** Marc S. Cheves, PS  
marc.cheves@chevesmedia.com

**ASSOCIATE EDITOR** Joel Leininger, PS  
**ASSISTANT EDITOR** Jacalyn Cheves

### CONTRIBUTING WRITERS

Joe Betit, PS	Michael J. Pallamary, PS
Shawn Billings, PS	Jerry Penry, PS
Landon Blake, PS	Walt Robillard, Esq., PS
J. Anthony Cavell, PS	Fred Roeder, PS
C. Barton Crattie, PS	Angus W. Stocking, PS
Dr. Richard L. Elgin, PS, PE	Patrick Toscano, PS
Gary Kent, PS	John Wilusz, PS, PE
Wendy Lathrop, PS	Robert Young, PS
John Matonich, PS	Rj Zimmer, PS

The staff and contributing writers may be reached via the online Message Center at [amerisurv.com](http://amerisurv.com)

**GRAPHIC DESIGN** LTD Creative, LLC  
**WEBMASTER** Joel Cheves

**AUDIENCE DEVELOPMENT** Edward Duff  
**ACCOUNT EXECUTIVE** Richard Bremer

*The American Surveyor* (ISSN 1548-2669) is published monthly by Cheves Media LLC. Editorial mailing address: 905 W. 7th St., #331, Frederick, MD 21701. Tel: (301) 620-0784.

*The American Surveyor* is a publication of Cheves Media LLC, 905 W. 7th St., #331, Frederick, MD. No part of this publication may be reproduced in any form without the express written permission of the publisher. Opinions and statements made by the writers and contributors do not necessarily express the views of Cheves Media LLC.

Subscriptions prices in the U.S.: Free for qualified professionals. Canada: 1 year \$56.00 US; international subscriptions \$72.00 per year (Airmail), U.S. funds prepaid. Back issues (subject to sufficient stock) are available for \$4.95 + S/H.

New subscription inquiries and all other address changes should be sent to *The American Surveyor*, P.O. Box 4162, Frederick, MD 21705-4162. Fax: 301-695-1538. Subscribe online @ [www.amerisurv.com](http://www.amerisurv.com)

Made in the United States of America



Proud Sponsor of:



# Our Value to Society

I have just finished reading an article in *The Economist* titled “Thinking twice about price. – In an age of austerity businesses needs to get better at charging more” (July 27th 2013 Issue). The article says that businesses coming out of the financial crisis have trimmed their workforce, and cut costs to the bone. So in order to boost profits, price is all that is left to make changes to the bottom line. Clever pricing can do a lot to increase your share of profit retention and increase your spending power. The surveying profession needs to take heed to this strategy.

Surveyors are notoriously bad at setting prices. With each new technology we absorb into our business we become more efficient and reduce the amount of effort required to undertake a survey. The result of spending less time on a survey, both in the field and in the office, is that we reduce the value of our services by charging our clients for our time on the job rather than the value of the service itself.

A survey that once would have taken a field crew of three, using a total station, a week, and two days calculating and drafting in the office, can now be done by one person, in a day using GPS and CAD drafting techniques. Do we charge the same fee to do the same job? No, we pass on all that increased efficiency to our client by continuing to charge for our time. Meanwhile, the value of the real estate we are surveying has increased many times over, which means that our liability has increased while our fees have decreased. Not a very good business strategy.

Whenever we attach our signature and seal to a survey, we create a legal document that bears a liability directly proportional to the value of the real estate on which we are reporting. Much of what we do is translated into deeds and title that facilitate valuable and legal real estate transactions. Deed descriptions are passed from one transaction to another over the decades, thus becoming ever more valuable over time. Are we adequately compensated for the legal descriptions we provide? Have you pointed out to your client the value you are creating for your client and their heirs?

One way to increase your profits is to identify the value you are providing your clients. I see just about all surveying services falling into two basic categories. One, we assist our clients in creating wealth by providing a service to increase the utility of their real estate. Subdividing land into more intensive land use (say, rural to urban or urban to commercial) adds value and wealth to our land owning clients. Staking out a new house enables the construction of a home in place of a vacant lot, thereby adding value to the land parcel. Two, we assist our clients in reducing risk by showing such things as encroachments by or upon the tract we are surveying, or showing easements not obvious on the land surface, so our clients do not invest in real estate with clouded titles.

I suggest to all in our profession, including students, that the best way to retain the value of our surveying services and to be directly in concert with the wealth we create for our clients is to charge ad valorem fees similar to architects, engineers, and real estate agents. Surveyors should be fearless in asking to be adequately compensated by their clients for the value and integrity we impart to the development of real estate and we should walk away if our clients do not understand this.

**Gary Jeffress** was born in Australia and is a Professor of Geographic Information Science at Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi. He has held professional land surveying licenses in New South Wales, Maine, and now Texas. He is past president and life member of the Texas Society of Professional Surveyors and past president of the Geographic and Land Information Society.