



Reconnaissance

A Land Title Survey in 15 Hours? LOL

Many readers will recall the \$10 million Ansari XPRIZE competition that Scaled Composites won in 2004 by sending a space ship to an altitude of 100 kilometers and bringing it safely back to earth twice in a two week period. Well, in 2013, Peter Diamandis, the founder of the XPRIZE Foundation, co-founded HeroX which is promoted on its website as an “innovative crowdfunding, crowdsourcing and problem solving” platform for entrepreneurs.

Through HeroX, anyone who has run into or perceives a technology, health, education, economics or community problem can design and fund a competition to encourage a solution.

This past May, I was contacted by a representative of HeroX who wanted to discuss barriers to automation of ALTA/ACSM (now NSPS) Land Title Surveys. After an interesting conference call in which I outlined the process of conducting a land title survey (order, research, analysis, fieldwork, more analysis, boundary resolution, plat preparation, and report and description preparation) and they asked where efficiencies could be realized, it was still not *exactly* clear to me what was behind the questions and why they were being asked.

A few weeks later, NSPS Executive Director Curt Sumner hosted HeroX on his weekly radio show to inform the listeners on HeroX and, in particular, to provide background on what we had come to understand was a challenge related to performing Land Title Surveys more quickly and at a lower cost.

As it turns out, the sponsor of this \$100,000 challenge is The William Warren Group (www.williamwarren.com) a self-storage, management, acquisitions and development company. The William Warren Group is a large consumer of

ALTA/NSPS Land Title Surveys and, while they obviously do not like the cost and time involved, they were—at least initially—obviously ill-informed about surveyors and Land Title Surveys.

From the challenge (which can be found at herox.com/AiLTA):

- “A notorious component of successful [real estate] transaction is the boundary survey. Not only can these surveys take more than a month to complete, but they’re incredibly expensive (some can cost more than \$5,000) and need to be conducted on-site ... by a human.”
- “ALTA is also a trade association, offering title insurance and providing licensing rights to surveyors who want to be certified to conduct an ALTA survey.”

“ [Land Title Surveys] are incredibly expensive (some can cost more than \$5,000) and need to be conducted on-site ... by a human. ”

In most markets that I am familiar with, a \$5,000 Land Title Survey would be quite a bargain. And in many, cases a \$20,000 Land Title Survey is the norm for a property of any size or complexity. And, oh my goodness, yes, human surveyors *do* need to go on-site. They need to find evidence that is often buried, invisible to the untrained eye and/or distant to the property itself.

For the foreseeable future, no amount of automation will take the place of the trained eye in finding that evidence, analyzing that evidence, and applying proper boundary law principles—any more than the preparation of a legal brief or

judicial decision can be automated. Yet, there are, no doubt, efficiencies waiting to be discovered—particularly in the data gathering, research and plat/map preparation of a Land Title Survey.

Recently, I was contacted by the president of The William Warren Group, Mr. Clark Porter, who reached out to me after I wrote them to correct the misconceptions and misinformation in their challenge (see above). We had a constructive conversation and he ended up inviting me to join him and 3 others as a judge for the competition—which invitation I accepted.

But, regardless of being a judge or not, I applaud this HeroX challenge and am anxious to see what interesting and ground-breaking ideas may come from it. We may be surprised at what obvious innovations we are missing.

On a side note, Southwest Airlines informs me that I flew 63,263 miles with them this year, the huge majority of which was dedicated to helping surveyors do their jobs with more confidence and knowledge. It is an honor to continue to serve our profession; I appreciate the support and opportunities. ■

Gary Kent is Director, Integrated Services at The Schneider Corporation in Indianapolis. He is past-president of ACSM and chairs the ALTA/ACSM Committee for NSPS and the Liaison Committee for ALTA. He is on the Indiana Board of Registration and lectures both locally and nationally.