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Building Brain Cells and Legacies

The care and feeding of brain cells has always been one of my greatest concerns, both of my own and of those belonging to others. It's why, even in the ancient days before I was licensed, I advocated increased educational requirements (beyond a high school diploma) for admittance to licensure exams, knowing that learning how to learn is as important as the facts themselves. If we don't know the solution to our situation, we must at least be able to frame questions in a way that will lead us either to the answer directly, or to resources that will help us get there.

How can we support the proliferation of surveying brain cells? One definite necessity is familiarizing younger students with what it is that we do, so that surveying appears on the radar screen when they are thinking about what they want to be when they grow up. But to maximize the success of that endeavor, their parents need to know what it is that we do as well ("You want to study WHAT?"). Yes, that means more public relations, whether through historical context or public works or presence in the schools.

Many of us have participated in traditional career days in our local school systems. Some of us have sponsored Trig Star contests in high schools. But other programs exist. Math Counts (www.mathcounts.org) for sixth through eighth graders includes local, state, and national competitions, as does Trig Star, and volunteers to show practical applications of math in the real world are always needed. There are also programs, such as those conducted by Penn State University, especially designed to encourage middle school and junior high school girls to seriously consider



mathematics and science-based studies and careers. The presentations are all by women, and there is a short supply of women surveyors to participate, but it has been a rewarding experience. It's all about rerouting young brain cells to be more receptive to new options.

Once we interest students and career-changers in surveying as a satisfying and fulfilling career, however, we must support them in their endeavors to pursue the education necessary for their success. Many of our state societies have established scholarships and foundations to administer them. The National Society of Professional Surveyors (NSPS) has done so as well, securing 501 (c)3 status to assure that all donations and bequests made to it are tax deductible for both individuals and corporations. Besides education, the NSPS Foundation also supports research and publication in the realm of surveying or related fields, and administers a disaster relief fund and a medical expense relief fund for surveyors across the nation.

The NSPS Foundation came into existence in 1995 after years of research and work by dedicated surveyors from various states. It currently administers ten different scholarships for individuals enrolled in full-time undergraduate

and graduate studies in surveying, geodesy, geographic information systems, photogrammetry and cartography (see the Foundation website at www.nspsmo.org/nsps_found/nsps_found.shtml for more information on qualifications and applications).

During the many years I served on New Jersey's foundation, we received a number of special contributions in memory of recently deceased members, as special memorials to those individuals. The NSPS Foundation has several named awards as well, standing as legacies of those for whom they are named, including some very important commercial sponsors. All of us have the opportunity to create such legacies, for ourselves or for our heroes. Those who wish to create a scholarship or memorial fund can provide the NSPS Foundation the guidelines by which the scholarship or memorial fund is to be awarded and operated. If assistance is needed, the Foundation Trustees can help in writing the guidelines. When both the fund's creator and the NSPS Foundation have reviewed the guidelines, a memorandum of understanding completes the contract for the Foundation to administer the fund in accordance with the established guidelines.

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We should be capitalizing on the legacies of those for whom various relief and educational awards are named; after all, they were real people, and real people are interesting. Many of the individuals for whom the funds are named made significant contributions to the knowledge base and/or professionalism of our chosen field. The award names should represent the real humans for whom they were named, not merely sums of money. For instance, the Joseph F. Dracup award is named for one of the finest geodesists I have ever known, a friend and supporter to me, and a great contributor to the advancement of geodetic knowledge and understanding. Joe created the Nettie Dracup award in his wife's name when she predeceased him, as a tireless supporter of his travels and dedication to his profession. He recognized that we should not forget those who enable us to achieve our dreams and potential.

We can promote our profession in non-monetary ways as well, supplying our hearts and knowledge to other surveyors and those who wish to become surveyors. Colorado's quiet but dedicated Bill McComber was tireless in his mentoring of novice surveyors, and the Professional Land Surveyors of Colorado has continued his legacy through the Bill McComber Memorial Mentoring Course. Ongoing programs within the mentoring course include mathematics, instrumentation, and the legal aspects of surveying. Every surveyor who becomes a mentor in Colorado is part of Bill's great legacy of patient guidance and enlightened young surveyors.

Building brain cells and legacies is part of our professional responsibility. Our educational institutions rely on donations of equipment and dollars. While some organizations rely on annual donations or fund raisers, we should worry about what happens when the economy dips. It is important to have a steady stream of income, even if not in the same quantity as during boom years, because the need for education and educational supplies never dries up. In fact, more people go back to school when the economy is poor, in order to make themselves more saleable, and so the need for scholarship funding can be greater than in the "fat" years of relative wealth. We can steer those new students to our proud profession, and we can honor the memory of those who came before us by joining together in creating legacy funds. 

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business marketplace for competence to develop – remember, appraisal value is based on comparable sales, adjusted up or down depending on the condition and extent of the subject under consideration versus the comparables. Most appraisals work that way. Generally, the few survey firm sales that do occur are not public record; thus, comparables will be hard to uncover. I do not doubt that some alternative method of determining value could be devised if the marketplace demanded it, and widespread insurance requirements would create that demand, but it does not now exist in meaningful numbers.

Aside from the premiums you would pay for the actual coverage, what would you be willing to spend on an appraisal every five years or so? \$5,000? \$10,000? Most surveyors would balk, I suspect, at paying for those studies, and thus, unwittingly find themselves in the same boat as the restaurateurs above. Naked.

There is no crime in having uninsured assets. The prudent business owner merely recognizes the lack of coverage and provides alternative systems to protect the assets; offsite copies of the records, for instance.

Smart Move

There is one class of papers generated by us that does benefit from valuable papers coverage: work in progress. This refers to the work started but not yet delivered to a client. Calamities tend to be indiscriminate in their destruction, taking the fresh and not-paid-for work as well as the paid-for and archived work. The short term effects on the firm of one versus the other are very different. In the short term, the loss of a firm's institutional memory has the effect of an annoyance; not so for the work in progress. Depending on the amount of undelivered work lying around, and on the cost in personnel necessary to produce it, having to produce it a second time, uncompensated, can take a firm under. That possibility, coupled with the insurance company's readiness to underwrite the cost, makes valuable papers coverage a wise choice. But only for that.

So the value of your valuable papers coverage should be the value of your average work-in-progress, and you would be smart to provide for offsite duplication of your archives. For now, there is no better alternative. 

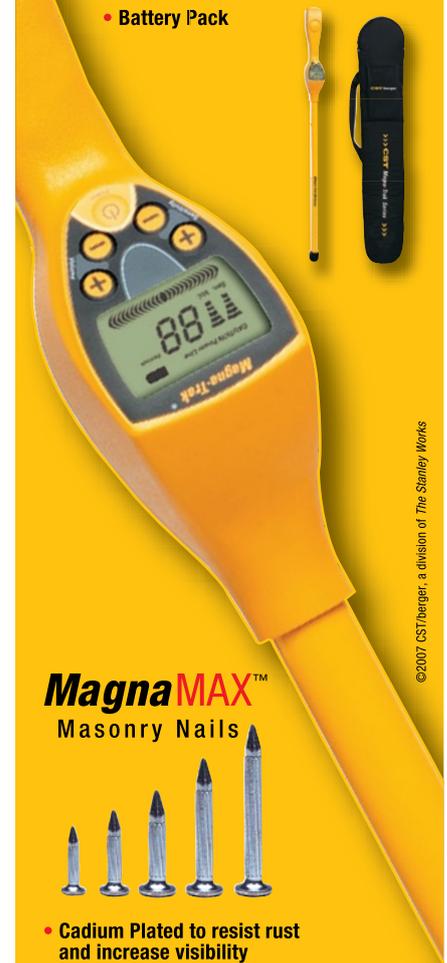
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