



The hunt for a site for a GPS station doubled as a memorable field trip for the author and his eight-year-old son.

For the Kids

I have a colleague who predicts surveyors will become as extinct as “buggy-whip” makers, alluding to crafts that have faded with societal changes. I like to counter that the remaining buggy-whip making artisans are highly respected and probably better paid than him. All kidding aside, I do not share the defeatist sentiments of some colleagues, though our profession may in some ways be shrinking as it always has. This is a fine profession, art, and legacy to pass on to the youngsters

Admittedly, the field (pardon the pun) is steadily growing smaller, and crew sizes have shrunk with each technological change. But like the Y2K doomsayers, the predictions will

be laughably erroneous and perhaps merely symptomatic of some other deep seated psychological issues. It gets to the point that when I hear such ‘doom-ousness,’ I snap back, “Fine, you go extinct, the rest of us will evolve!”

As long as there is privately owned land, folks will need land surveyors. As long as surveyors need to evaluate all evidence, there will need to be a field component. Until there is no more traffic to contend with, robotic stations with force fields to protect them, and geoid models perfected to the nanometer, we will need humans in the field to collect that evidence. This is a fine and honorable profession, and those who are in related fields or have need of our services generally regard surveyors with due respect.

Not that we couldn’t do a better job of keeping the relevancy and visibility of the field a bit closer to the public eye, especially when it comes to the next generations. Even our own kids may find this whole subject a bit of a yawn. We might tell them that surveying is both a job and an adventure, but after daily exposure to some of the more mundane aspects of a surveying parent’s (or parents’) work-life, they may conclude that it is just another job. Your goal may or may not necessarily be to see any of your kids follow your footsteps into this career path, but your own kids are truly the gateway to that entire generation in passing along good word-of-mouth about surveying.

It’s not like surveying gets a lot of airtime. It is rare that surveyors are

>> By Gavin Schrock, LS



Exhibiting an eye for detail, the author's four-year-old daughter points to a marker she discovered in front of the Kiyomizu Temple in Kyoto, Japan.

portrayed as characters in popular media, and even when we get a glimpse of a surveying instrument it is being used improperly (remember Harrison Ford leaning on the scope in *Raiders of the Lost Ark*?). There just is not going to be mainstream exposure for surveying; it would take a Spielbergian epic about Mason and Dixon (probably starring Will Smith and “The Rock” replete with soundtrack from Coldplay) to show that surveyors are not some type of telephone researchers. Gee, now that I think about it, I wonder what movies could be done about surveying—*The Longest Meter*, *A Few Good Chain-men* (starring Tom Cruise and Jack Nicholson), *I Know What you Surveyed Last Summer*, *Total Station* (yo, Ahhhnold), *True Lines* (mo Ahhhnold) ... but I digress ...

Effective engagement of your kids in the positive aspects of your career is a challenge. I have taken the advice of teachers I know and tried to spark interest

that is age appropriate; the eight-to-ten-year-old phase is when they are getting their spatial concepts together, like time, space, and the earth. This is a good time to focus on the physical aspects of surveying as an adventure—hunt for monuments together, or visit some historic or scenic marker. If possible, let them set a monument and stamp it with their initials, or include them in the field notes—anything that fosters a feeling of inclusion but is brief (remember, they have

of the old transits sitting in people’s closets have been donated to elementary schools to give help kids answer what may be their first trigonometry question: “How can you measure across a river without crossing it?” Almost every school district in the country has some sort of accelerated program, even at the elementary school level. It would be a noble goal for the surveying industry to provide each of these elementary schools with some kind of surveying instrument, and a bit of training for one or more of their teachers.

A note to equipment manufacturers: the fine folks at Apple hit the jackpot years ago not entirely undue to their courting of the academic community. They donated so many of those Mac things to colleges and universities that when the students eventually landed

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the attention spans of flashbulbs).

Our associations can do more of the outreach. I know that sponsorship of math competitions is a logical extension, but how many of the winners actually choose surveying as a profession? The needs are not only for traditional land surveyors; how are we going to inspire the next generation of geodesists, survey software developers, survey law specialists, surveying media publishers, leaders and innovators? Local associations have employed a great many methods of sponsoring educational and academic events and programs to this end.

Some of the innovative ideas include: buying some cheap GPS units to donate to local elementary schools so the kids can create maps of their own neighborhoods or participate in geocaching. One association has secured public art funding to add artworks to their calibration baseline with a scale solar-system theme, a logical educational destination for school field trips. Some

their first jobs and were asked advice about computers, (by their clueless overseers) they were already loyal to the brand. Folks tend to remember the color of the paint on the first survey instrument they used, thereby building fierce brand loyalties.

I was recently on a hike in the beautiful mountains of the Pacific Northwest with my eight-year-old son. We were looking for a site to locate a GPS station, but primarily just enjoying the time while I can still keep up. He stopped and asked if this sort of outdoor excursion was what surveyors do. I replied, “It can be ...” *AS*

Gavin Schrock is a surveyor and GIS analyst for Seattle Public Utilities, where he focuses on using digital data to improve cost ratios for engineering projects. He has worked in surveying, mapping, data management, and GIS for over two decades in the civil, utility, and mapping disciplines. He has published in these fields and has taught these subjects at local, state, national, and international conferences.