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It Started at the Fair



Photo Courtesy of Missouri Department of Natural Resources

L-R: Mark Templeton, former Director of Missouri DNR; Juliana Blackwell, Director, NGS; Gov. Jay Nixon; Ralph Riggs, MSPS President; and Darrell Pratte, State Land Surveyor and Land Survey Program Director, Div. of Geology and Land Survey, Missouri DNR.

On the opening day of the 2010 State Fair, the Missouri Society of Professional Surveyors started a Height Modernization Survey. This is a volunteer effort across the state with private surveyors donating their time and resources. Public surveyors from state and federal agencies also take part. We started the survey immediately following Governor Jay Nixon's official opening of the fair when he literally stepped off the stage from his opening remarks and into our information booth. Missouri surveyor Darrell Pratte opened our event by introducing Ralph Riggs, president of the Missouri Society of Professional Surveyors. President Riggs made a few remarks and then introduced Juliana Blackwell, Director of the National Geodetic Survey. She added remarks about the importance and benefits of the survey and introduced the governor.

With the push of a button on a GPS receiver over a geodetic marker on the fairgrounds, Governor Nixon underscored the importance of this survey, the impact it will have on agriculture, floodplain mapping, and the allocation of precious natural resources into the future. Apart from the formal festivities, volunteer surveyors in the booth took advantage of opportunities to educate the public as to just what it is surveyors do. Mostly it was "just" folks stopping by. Some would just peruse the displays, ask a few questions about surveying, and move along. Some brought their kids, pointed to an instrument and said, "We see guys with these standing beside the road all the time." Another person chided, "Surveyors never agree, so what's the point?" Others with real boundary issues expressed their need of a surveyor. Each visit was an opportunity to educate the public about what surveyors do. In a

relaxed venue like that, discussions can range from the research involved in a survey to the gathering of record and field evidence, services only a professional surveyor can provide. At our booth we keep a membership directory on hand to share with folks who are in need of a surveyor in their county. You never know who might walk up. One morning a woman came to the booth and started asking very specific questions about licensing and getting started in our profession. Turned out she was a high school guidance counselor from Minnesota who wanted to gain knowledge about surveying for her students. Another was an advisor to a high school chapter of Future Farmers of America (FFA). Other visitors included county commissioners from distant corners of the state, county recorders, judges, and one of our state representatives. The ripple effect of those pleasantly informative conversations with

people from many walks of life elevates the profession. Only the Lord knows whose life may be positively impacted by a seed planted in a casual conversation at a state fair.

There is no 'typical' fair volunteer. Our booth changes every day with each new group of professionals who show up. The atmosphere is relaxed and casual. One day I had the privilege of volunteering with a member of our society's Board of Directors, a sole proprietor and a member of the State Licensing Board. There is no script, and about the only rule is that we marketing our profession and not our individual businesses. Professional surveyors come from every corner of the state at their own expense, and bring their own equipment and displays. Subject matter varies. Someone from the Association of County Surveyors may be most comfortable explaining the science and the art of following the footsteps of the original government surveyors, while metro folks may be more comfortable explaining the latest survey technologies and applications.

The roots of our profession go a long way back. In the Old Testament there is a verse that says, "So He brought me there; and behold, there was a man



Photo Courtesy of Missouri Department of Natural Resources

With the push of a button, Gov. Nixon, flanked by Darrell Pratte and Mark Templeton, officially signals the collection of critical elevation data across the state.

whose appearance was like the appearance of bronze, with a line of flax and a measuring rod in his hand; and he was standing in the gateway (Ezekiel 40: 3)." While we may not shine like bronze, or have an impressive event like the Height Modernization Survey to kick off a public event, there are ample opportunities to educate the public as to the important role surveyors maintain in society. It just takes one dedicated land surveyor

taking time to get involved and share his or her love of the profession with someone else. Success is measured by a local surveyor in a distant corner of the state getting a call, or by a high school student who now considers a profession never thought of before. It starts with the efforts of you, the professional surveyor, getting involved and making a difference for the future of our time honored and noble profession. *As*