



The Savvy Surveyor

— A column on all matters of surveying by R. William Glassey, PLS

What is a land surveyor?

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A land surveyor is, of necessity, part historian, part cartographer, part mathematician, part handwriting analyst, part truck mechanic, and part mind reader. A surveyor is also a professional skilled at contract and boundary law, psychology, and collections —of receivables, as well as geospatial data, monument records, and other information pertinent to the work of a surveyor. A sole proprietor of a surveying business practices in all of these disciplines, and more.

When one begins studying to take professional exams for surveyors, one quickly realizes there is an incredible array of information upon which one could be tested. This situation is further compounded in states that “stubbornly insist” on including planning or design questions in their exams. A land surveyor thus possesses many qualities essential in every “renaissance person.”

I believe this multi-disciplinary aspect of land surveying is at least partially responsible for the broad diversity of surveying practitioners. (Or could it possibly be the other way around?) I have personally worked with professional surveyors whose educational backgrounds were in physics, chemistry, mathematics, geology, agriculture, forestry, geography, philosophy, meteorology, law, land titles, engineering, and other disciplines. We seem to have been attracted to surveying from practically any field of human endeavor, whereas most other professions have considerably more restrictive career paths. Surveyors are a diverse group, and collectively we account for tremendous talent, knowledge and wide variety of interests.

I often reflect on how this diversity impacts other people’s perceptions of surveying as a profession. To those of us who have committed a lifetime to the profession, surveying is a profession steeped in spatial truth. It’s a profession expected to provide geographic information—recently collected or in the past. “Have you ever done any projects in Douglas County?,” a client of mine, might ask. Or, “Can

you recall if the section corner in question was a brass cap, or a stone, when you visited it in 1990?” Thank heaven for detailed field notes! Being a surveyor is a constant challenge for our memories, and I believe it helps us stay mentally sharp. This mental exercise also directly leads us toward honesty and truthfulness, as any exaggeration or misstatement will clearly degrade and complicate an already nearly impossible challenge. Small wonder that this honesty also creeps into our personal lives and business practices! This may also help to explain why surveyors are such a pleasant and professional group, and why so many have become close friends.

Surveying challenges us to keep abreast of emerging geospatial technology, while remaining true to the basic tenets of surveying—honesty and truthfulness. Being a surveyor is fun, though this is great responsibility!

We are proud of our work and enjoy doing it whether it’s in the field or in front of a computer screen. I have always thought that surveying is the perfect blend of physical and mental activity.

Many years ago, I worked for a character who was fond of saying, “Surveying would make a great hobby!” This philosophy can get us in trouble, as some practitioners are far too quick to low-ball a project. **The fact that we enjoy our work should not diminish its value!**

Surveyors provide information and services which protect people’s largest investment—their real estate. As such, we are advised to work closely with attorneys and title professionals. We are also encouraged to collaborate with other geospatial professionals, such as photogrammetrists, geodesists and GIS experts whenever possible. Our clients will appreciate such cooperation, our professionalism will soar, and I believe all will benefit from it as a result.

Surveyors are fact finders; we report the truth on the ground. (The truth shall set you free...)

Pleasant surveying! ■

Want to comment? Contact The Savvy Surveyor Bill Glassey at <lancer.bear@gmail.com>.