

GEN-X AND MILLENNIALS: ASPRS IS SUSTAINABLE!

by Stewart Walker



It is an honor and privilege to stand before you today, entrusted with the stewardship of the Society in its 80th year. My first thought is to thank my family for their support and to acknowledge the inspiration and encouragement given to me by my teachers in photogrammetry, Gordon Petrie at the University of Glasgow, Sam Masry at the

University of New Brunswick and my photogrammetric colleague and mentor Cliff Burnside at the University of East London.

You may think it strange to be addressed by someone with a foreign accent and in doing the research for this address I learned that perhaps the last such case was when Georg Zarzycki was President in 1982. That was the same year Jim Plasker was director of the ASPRS/ACSM Annual Conference in Denver!

I must pay tribute to my predecessor, Steve DeGloria, for leading us through a year of tumultuous change, so different from what he must have expected when he gave his presidential address in Baltimore. Last summer, Jim Plasker informed us that he would retire from his position as Executive Director at the beginning of 2014. We implemented a succession plan on which we had been working, appointed Dr. Michael Hauck as Executive Director in February and we're delighted to welcome him. Tragically, on 27th December 2013, Associate Executive Director and Director of Communications, Kim Tilley, passed away suddenly and unexpectedly. Kim was involved in many aspects of the Society. I, wholeheartedly, wish to thank our headquarters staff for their dedication and flexibility during these times, recognizing that "the show must go on". The Society suffered also from governmental turbulence, which has hit our conferences particularly hard in terms of attendance and programming and thus the Society as a whole. Finally, Bobbi Lenczowski, Past President, has completed her four years as an officer of the Society. I especially wish to thank Bobbi for her eloquence, experience, calm and unstinting service to the Society. It has been a rare joy to have benefited from her expertise. Now remember, all these events occurred in one year, so you can see why Steve DeGloria deserves extra praise

for his leadership of the Society through twelve difficult months. My hope is that I can offer the same level of leadership throughout 2014 with the ideas I have to share with you today.

It is salutary to wonder at the development of geospatial technologies, including LiDAR and other remarkable sensors, and the impact of GIS - even in our own lifetimes. Photogrammetry, remote sensing and GIS are pieces in a geomatics jigsaw that offer compelling technologies and exciting career prospects for today and beyond. During my years as Vice President and President-Elect, I gave presentations at various meetings and shared my personal and historical viewpoint on our industry. My inspiration was the hypothetical question of what Edgar Hynes Thompson (1910-76), Professor of Photogrammetry at University College London, would have thought of the remarkable changes in the technology and evolution of our field. Remember that our everyday technologies, such as airborne digital cameras, digital photogrammetric workstations, GPS and high-resolution satellite imagery, came after Thompson's death. It is humbling to reflect on how quickly this amazing industry evolves. For a touch of humor and to highlight Michael Hauck's predilections, I contrasted a photograph of Daleks, the science fiction villains of the British television series *Doctor Who*, which began in the 1960s and would have been known to Thompson, with a series of views of modern mobile mapping systems! In more recent talks, I have embellished this, commenting that the lead Dalek wants to be author/ editor of one of the extra-terrestrial chapters of the fourth edition of the *Manual of Remote Sensing*, a major, all electronic work under the development and leadership of Stan Morain and Amy Budge. Please contact them if you wish to contribute to this initiative - they will be pleased to hear from you. I am proud to be a part of the astonishing geospatial industry and honored to act as leader of the Society as technical wonders continue to unfold.

We are active in our field at a time of remarkable development. We have seen the consumerization of photogrammetry and remote sensing, with imagery and location-based services permeating every aspect of life. The landscape is enhanced with innovative start-ups, for example in several ongoing ventures to launch and operate flocks of inexpensive earth observation satellites with their imagery offered through imaginative business models. These will be complemented by lower altitude, extremely economical sensing capabilities from UAVs. Emerging, adjacent technologies such as robotics and the Internet of Things will transform our lives.

Could insufficient trumpeting of these wonders be

a factor behind the biggest challenge we currently face – declining membership? The Society has witnessed in recent years a sharp drop in membership, especially in the Active Member category, which reflects our lack of success in retaining student members after they graduate. Acknowledging this, the Board of Directors addressed the problem in multiple ways, one of which was to appoint Roger Crystal as Membership Development Leader. Roger thoroughly and systematically undertook this role and toiled to welcome new members, contact lapsed members and involve region officers through regular teleconferences. His resignation, which becomes effective here in Louisville, was received with regret by the Society's Executive Committee.

Falling membership is the main reason for our financial status: income from dues, conferences, publications, and advertising has also declined. Though Jim Plasker and Michael Hauck have been careful guardians of the Society's resources and expenditure has been tightly controlled, revenues and obligations have not been aligned and, on occasion, we've had to turn to the Society's reserves. Though these are substantial, the situation cannot continue indefinitely, so we must seek solutions with urgency and imagination.

A smaller Society has different requirements and members' expectations evolve. One source of potential members is the Gen-Xers and Millennials. We have heard experts analyze these generational groups and understand some key elements. We know that they are hardly ready joiners of organizations, whereas I joined ASP almost automatically during my first days as a graduate student in New Brunswick in 1973. We know they are perceived to avoid face-to-face events in favor of electronic communication. But they tend to be politically and socially active in their communities. We should have the courage to seek new members in the workplace and assess the benefits of membership. Is membership sufficiently attractive? How can we improve it? How do we most effectively embrace the Gen-Xers and Millennials or the Lidar and UAS people? These are questions I would like to answer.

The year of change has enabled us to build a platform on which to "re-calibrate" the Society in order to delight the new members whom we want to attract. I intend to convene a task force to examine the streamlining of the governance of the Society. I propose that we take a strategic look at the current arrangement of divisions and committees with an eye toward transformation and a lesser number overall. I want to examine the role and *modus operandi* of Excom and the Board. In one way this process has already begun: the St. Louis and Central regions are coming together to form a new, vibrant entity called the Heartland Region. Having greater mass ensures focus on effective technical meetings and networking events, both electronically and face-to-face, rather than the administrative burden.

It is not my intention to bring you messages of doom and gloom. Rather, I want next to underline the many strengths of the Society, such as:

- Student activities
- Supportive Sustaining Members

- Webinars
- PE&RS journal, electronic and print
- Books
- Conferences
- Awards
- Certification
- Participation in higher level bodies, e.g. COGO, NGAC, ISPRS
- Headquarters building
- Reliable, conscientious, flexible Staff
- Excellent work from the Divisions
- Excellent local events run by the regions
- Willingness to host joint conferences, e.g. CaGIS, ISPRS, JACIE, MAPPS
- Professional home for defense image and geospatial analysts
- Professional home for Lidar and UAS practitioners

We all have our favorites, but, in my own case, I am always heartened by the student activities, for example, conference volunteers, technical sessions on pertinent topics, poster sessions, regional groups, Student Advisory Council and social events, all focused on students. And I could not mention these without warm words of thanks to Rakesh Malhotra, Conference Student Coordinator. Rakesh has worked with the students at every conference since 2011 and has recently expressed a desire to step down. If anyone is interested in a truly rewarding experience I strongly recommend volunteering for this fantastic opportunity. Closely related is the growing and complex awards program. Al Stevens and Jesse Winch work tirelessly to make this a resounding success every year. I am seeking help for Al, to lighten his load, so again please contact me if you are interested in involvement.

I wish gratefully to commend our Sustaining Members, who have supported the Society and participated in exhibitions, even when they would prefer larger attendances and heavier traffic of prospective customers. In technical sessions and sponsorships too, the Sustaining Members uphold the Society.

The certification program is healthy and becoming better known. I was proud during a plenary at the International LiDAR Mapping Forum in Denver in February to hear Mike Renslow announce that certification for Lidar practitioners is on the way. Mike does a wonderful job with certification and we are enormously grateful. The Society must do what is necessary to become a professional home for not only the Lidar but also the UAS practitioners.

Joint events are important too – I take personal pleasure that a suggestion I made some time ago, to join up with the JACIE Workshop, has borne fruit here in Louisville. Furthermore, our Fall Conference will not only be a Pecora event, but will be run jointly with the intercongressional Symposium of ISPRS

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Commission I, under Technical Commission President Charles Toth, who is also Vice President of ASPRS. Under the leadership of Becky Morton, the Northern California region is preparing an exciting event in October at the FAA UAV test site near Reno, Nevada, completely focused on the new UAS platforms and the products facilitated by their use. Finally, our divisions are working on relevant, high-quality projects that truly make a difference. The Society is producing a range of standards and guidelines that will have real influence in the industry.

Summing up, I exhort you to help the Society expand its vision. We will simplify the organization. We must rejuvenate the Society's value proposition if membership is to be more appealing. Let's push what we do best – networking, mentoring, technical meetings, publications, the work of the divisions, student activities, awards and certification. I have touched many times on the marvels of our technologies, so let's focus on members' success. We will make special efforts to support the Sustaining Members, who have been so generous to the Society for so long. Remember our tagline – the Imaging & Geospatial Information Society. We are ASPRS - a society - and together we will enlarge membership.

I have already stressed the importance of people. I wish to repeat my thanks to our headquarters staff for their extra efforts in testing times. Our headquarters building is located in a pleasant area of parkland in suburban Bethesda, Maryland. If your travels take you to that part of the world, please pop in to say hello – they will be pleased to see you.

[The presidential address was followed by a few words from Michael Flanagan about the Young Professionals Council, which is very active in providing for members as they leave student-hood and advance into the early years of their careers.]