



Surveying Merit Badge; A recruitment tool par excellence

By Frank Lenik, PLS

There are few challenges facing the profession of land surveying today which are as great as the need to revitalize our ranks with young and technologically savvy individuals. We all recognize the aging of our colleagues but cannot seem to identify the reasons for the lack of new blood coming into the field. New tools and technologies have been introduced, but the application of these tools to our methodologies has been slow.

One of the storied tools for education and outreach has been the Boy Scout Surveying Merit Badge. As a former scout and scout leader, I recognize the value of the merit badge system as a way to introduce young people to various fields as a way to encourage them to grow and learn about the world around them. I typically attend a troop meeting or camporee to teach the scouts about the highlights of surveying and guide them through the requirements for the badge.

Recently however, I was introduced to a new and exciting way to work with scouts to earn this merit badge which I believe is a game changer. This idea was shared with me by the students at the Pennsylvania State University in Wilkes Barre, Pennsylvania. If you are unfamiliar with the school I will just say that it is one of the premier Surveying Engineering institutions in the United States. PSU offers three options to its students, a two year associate degree in Surveying Technology, a four year bachelor's degree in Surveying Engineering and a five year concurrent program which results in both a bachelor's degree in Surveying Engineering and a bachelor's degree in Civil Engineering.

The Penn State model is really quite ingenious. Rather than teaching the scouts at some remote location where their attention is easily diverted, the students and faculty invite local scout troops to visit their campus for a Surveying Merit Badge day. The program run by the surveying students themselves and includes a field component, a computer lab component and a barbecue prepared by the students.

The main strengths of the program are the peer to peer sharing of the knowledge of our profession and the introduction of the Penn State Surveying Engineering program to middle and high school age youth who will soon be looking to enter into the higher education system. What better emissaries of our field than those who are young and excited about it and how better to attract new students to our college programs than to invite them in for hands on experience.

As your liaison to the NSPS Young Surveyors Network and Chairman of the Youth Outreach subcommittee I challenge you to share this idea with every educational institution in your region. I further ask that you share with NSPS any ideas which you have on how we can grow and sustain our profession. I welcome your comments and can be reached via email at frank.lenik@me.com, via twitter @franklenik, or on face book at National Surveyors Week.