



Hear from Women in the biz ...

What its like to be at the leading
edge and paving the way!

While there are more men in the surveying profession than women, this is changing almost exponentially and there are no good reasons not to think of a career in surveying just because of your gender. Here are a few articles about women in surveying and their experiences.

Is it difficult for a woman to become an Alberta Land Surveyor?

Written by Lesley Ewoniak, ALS, for the ALS News, June 2006 issue, published by the Alberta Land Surveyors' Association.

I seems as though all we ever hear about these days is the shortage of labour. Where can we find all the people to fill the gaps of all of the field crews that we need to satisfy our client's demands? Let me suggest a possibility...women.

Yes of course, I know the difficulties that may arise from hiring a female in the oil and gas industry. Many of the consultants are hesitant in having a "girl" come out to do the survey for them. However, I found that I had more success in dealing with them than not.

Let me give you some statistics concerning the current standing of the make-up of the market place. Women make up an estimated 47% of the labour market (Statistics Canada 2005), which is consistent with the University of Calgary Geomatics Engineering program having approximately 50% of students being female. The increasing number of women in geomatics in both BC and Alberta show promise that the under-representation of women in geomatics is fading. However, women commissioned or registered as articling students with the Alberta Land Surveyors Association account for only 11.5% of the total membership and only 2% of the Association of British Columbia Land Surveyors' membership.

To raise awareness of a career in land surveying, Lesley Anne Sick, (articling ALS), Shauna Goertzen (BCLS), and I held a presentation at the University of Calgary Geomatics Career Day on February 2, 2006. The objectives of the presentation were to increase the level of understanding of how to obtain a commission, as well as the role of a land surveyor. Topics of the discussion specific to women were the physical demands, safety, and work/life balance that come with having a career in land surveying.

I find that the main concern of women entering our work force are the physical demands of the job. Hiding the fact that land surveying is physically demanding will not make the industry more attractive to females, instead it will give them a false sense of what it is like. However, there are many ways to work around the tasks to decrease the amount of intensity that a job appears to have. Here are some examples:

- Use the buddy system; Having a female chainperson for most of my party chiefing time, we had to use the strength of two people rather than one.
- Be smart; Look for alternatives to the "brute force" method.

- Use equipment that makes tasks easier; Instead of lifting a quad out of the mud, use a winch.
- Maintain your equipment; Chopping down a tree with a sharp axe is much easier than with an axe that is dull.

Women in the land surveying profession do not have to be amongst the strongest women in the world, they just need to be smart about how the tasks can be accomplished. Having the knowledge and physical capabilities are important, but attitude is a huge success factor.

Sugar coating things is not really my strong suit so I'm not going to tell the women out there that this profession is fully accepting of women. However, I will say that it is getting much better. The number of women encountered in the field is continually increasing, reducing the shock to consultants when a female crew arrives to survey a pipeline. I found that in the majority of cases, the female presence is welcomed. If it isn't, it doesn't take a long time for them to discover that the job can get done regardless of who is completing it.

Safety has changed the way we conduct ourselves in the field. When I speak to females wanting to enter the profession, they are not only concerned with safe work procedures, they are more concerned about the possible harassment that they may encounter in the field. Your personality and the way you conduct yourself will have the most impact on what you will have to deal with. I found that the majority of the time the situations that you encounter are under your control.

Work/life balance is a very important consideration when selecting a career. Land surveying is similar to other professions and one cannot always expect to enjoy regular hours. The hours that a land surveyor works can range from 40 to 80 hours a week. This will depend on the chosen region and sector serviced.

In the current job force, more employers are being flexible with work schedules, hours, and vacations where family commitments are concerned. Many land surveyors find that their own clients dictate their workload. They have the freedom and flexibility to manage their projects and the number of hours they work.

Unfortunately, there is a lack of manpower and a large volume of work and finding the "work-life balance" can be a challenge. Having said that, employers are willing to accommodate professionals and other employees, to ensure that the career they have chosen is a satisfying one. As a professional, your value to your employer will be substantial, and thus finding a routine which meets your needs is a priority.

I strongly encourage women to enter into land surveying. I find that every day presents itself with a new challenge, and with the rate of change in technology the amount that one can learn is unlimited.

Do you ever remember reading this riddle and being stumped?

A young boy and his father were out playing football when they were caught at the bottom of a giant pileup. Both were injured and rushed to the hospital. They were wheeled into separate operating rooms and two doctors prepped up to work on them, one doctor for each patient. The doctor operating on the father got started right away, but the doctor assigned to the young boy stared at him in surprise. "I can't operate on him!" the doctor exclaimed to the staff. "That child is my son!"

How can that be? Until more women got into medicine, the answer was not as easily thought of as it is today.

The image of what a surveyor looks like is changing.

First Female Land Surveyor in British Columbia

Profile: Teresa Myrfield

Written by Katherine Gordon, published in the Times Colonist, May 29, 2005

Despite the fact that we tend to think of surveyors today as nuisances at the side of the road blocking traffic, the land surveying profession in British Columbia is an old and honourable one. Mackenzie started mapping the province in the late 18th century. Our first professional surveyor was Joseph Despard Pemberton in 1851. Three out of 27 Lieutenant-Governors have come from the ranks of BC surveyors – Joseph Trutch, Edgar Dewdney, and Henry Bell-Irving.

But until 1999, they were all men. In January of that year, Teresa Myrfield and Julia MacRory received BC Land Surveyor (BCLS) commissions 773 and 775 respectively. In January 2005, exactly one hundred years after the incorporation of provincial land surveyors, Shauna Goertzen joined Myrfield and MacRory as BCLS 798: the third woman in the province to receive her commission.

Myrfield, who now runs Pacific Land Surveying in Nanaimo, didn't start off her career as a surveyor. In fact, she hated the surveying components of her geophysics course at Queens' University in Kingston, Ontario. But in the mid-1990s, after seven years' of working as a geophysicist in bush camps all over the world, she was ready for a change. "When I looked at it again, I realized surveying was a lot more interesting than I had thought." It meant going back to school to get another degree, this time in geomatics engineering at the University of Calgary. Myrfield hadn't previously appreciated the range of subjects that land surveying covered, including complex mathematical skills, environmental analysis, and land law. She hasn't looked back: "It includes a lot of field work, which I still love, but now I can come home at night. So it's a very practical compromise."

Myrfield thinks that women have come so late to the profession in BC as a matter of chance as much as anything else. There had certainly been women working in the surveying field in BC before her. But for a variety of reasons, none of them completed their BCLS commissions. Surveying also demands considerable physical strength and mechanical ability. While these are characteristics that Myrfield emphasizes aren't attributable wholly to either men or women – "How many male or female graduates of the geomatics program do you think come out knowing how to wield an axe properly? Not many!" – neither has the education system directed young women at surveying as a career choice.

Being a woman in a male-dominated occupation has certainly been an interesting experience; but there really isn't any black-and-white way to characterize it, says Myrfield. She'd been warned before graduation in the late 1990s that she might have trouble getting work. "And it was hard to get a job. It was. There's no getting around that." Just before receiving her degree, she did land a job, with Jim Christie at McElhanney Associates in Vancouver. Christie had a summer camp job he thought she could cope with and hired her straight away as a junior field assistant. "I was very lucky to work for Jim. He simply wanted the work done well, it didn't matter who you were."

Myrfield says being a woman makes a difference to the work. "It does matter, we have different styles. For example, I like to get everyone on a job working together to come up

with ideas, not just say, follow me, this is what we're going to do. I think that can be thought of as a female characteristic." But she can also understand why she experienced reluctance from potential employers in the beginning. She doesn't think that was unreasonable, in context: "If you had no experience of a capable female surveyor before, why would you think otherwise?"

Things have started to change in the profession, even in six years. On the whole, says Myrfield, her main experience with other land surveyors has been a "genuine pleasure in seeing that [women] are here at last." It is history in the making, and the sense of history is something to which all land surveyors, male or female, are strongly wedded. Myrfield discovered her own love of surveying history on her first summer field job. "I was catapulted right into the old-fashioned way of working with a compass and chain in a remote area. We were backpacking and camping as we went. And we kept finding all this old evidence of past surveys – it was fascinating." Touched by following in the footsteps of the pioneer surveyors who had walked the same trails, Myrfield went straight to the surveying history books and started reading. "It grabbed me big time."

Ever since, she has been overwhelmed by the sense of commitment to land surveying that both the men and women in her profession have. "Working with them in the field you can really see it. These are people whose hearts sing, when they're just sitting around talking about surveying problems. You go to the AGM and you're with people who just can't stop talking about surveying. It's pretty neat." So these aren't just people in red vests at the side of the road slowing down traffic?

Myrfield laughs. "I used to think that too before I became one," she says. "But we're really a lot more interesting than that."

Copyright © Author Katherine Gordon

Katherine Gordon is also the author of Made to Measure: A History of Land Surveying in British Columbia (Sono Nis Press, 2006)

New land surveyor makes Sask. history

Written by Joe Couture for the Regina Leader-Post, Wednesday, August 15, 2007

Although it's rare to hear of a "first female" anything anymore, Jill Cheverie has unintentionally found herself a place in the history books. On Monday, Cheverie became the first woman to hold the commission of Saskatchewan Land Surveyor.

Cheverie received her education at the University of New Brunswick, one of only two schools in Canada offering the required engineering speciality. As her graduating class consisted of five women and four men, Cheverie didn't expect her gender would make her unique in the field. "It wasn't something really in the forefront of my mind at any point," she said. "It was kind of a nice little surprise, I guess."

The east-coaster came to the province along with her fiancée, who took the same training as her, and who now also works as a land surveyor at the same office of Midwest Surveys in Maple Creek. Cheverie joins 64 other surveyors registered through the Saskatchewan Land Surveyor's Association (SLSA), all of whom are male. She's received a welcome reception among her peers, especially because land surveyors are in high demand in the province, she said.

That's part of the significance of Cheverie's appointment to the SLSA, according to its executive director, Carl Shiels. With the Baby Boom bubble heading to retirement, attracting new members from all demographics is important, he said. "Many of our sister associations across the country have had ladies getting into the profession for quite some time," he said. "So we're anxious to demonstrate we're a profession that's open to all demographic groups."

While training for the profession is rigorous -- requiring a university degree, practical work under a mentor, completion of a large project and the taking of six exams -- the low profile of the profession is to blame for its difficulty in attracting new blood, Shiels said. He hopes Cheverie's addition will help attract other women to the field.

While in the past the profession was dominated by men largely due to its physical demands, technology has changed much of that, Shiels said. "There was a day when the commissioned surveyor himself was out lugging around a lot of heavy equipment," he explained. "Nowadays, the professional surveyor is typically supervising a field crew or a number of field crews ... For the most part, between ATVs and global positioning systems and so on, there's no reason modern-day women can't handle it quite comfortably."

While a few heads may turn simply because of the novelty, Cheverie won't experience any difficulties due to her gender, he added. "The people who are in the profession right now are of my generation -- I'm 61 years old," Shiels said. "Our daughters have educated us very well on the way the new world works and should work."

© The Leader-Post (Regina) 2007

Copyright © 2007 CanWest Interactive, a division of CanWest MediaWorks Publications, Inc.. All rights reserved.

www.setyourboundaries.ca

Protected by copyright. All Rights Reserved.
[Legal Statement and Terms](#) of Use Relating to this Site