

MISSOURI SURVEYOR

A Quarterly Publication of the
Missouri Society of Professional Surveyors

Jefferson City, Missouri

June 2020



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Missouri Surveyor Profile: Father and Son Surveyors, Greg and Nick Bowers

by Donald Martin, PLS

The Missouri surveying community has its fair share of *legacy surveyors*; those who have taken up the trade as a son or daughter of a fellow surveyor. Not uncommon in the world of America's small businesses, lineage often serves as a sustaining force for trade and commercial services in our land. And if small businesses are the backbone of this country, it is family businesses which are the backbone of small businesses. Well, such a legacy came alive when a *Missouri Surveyor* reader suggested a feature about MSPS member Greg Bowers. You see, to tell the "story" of Greg Bowers is to journey across generations...it is a tale of surveyors and sons.

Greg Bowers

Vice President & Regional Manager
Anderson Engineering, Inc., Joplin



Focus of surveying practice

As with most any firm undertaking the practices of surveying and engineering services, Greg Bowers and his team at Anderson Engineering are ready to address a broad range of client needs. They can meet most any surveying need clients may bring to them. But while managing the surveying activities for four of his firm's offices (Joplin and Springfield, Missouri; Rogersville, Arkansas; and Destin, Florida), Greg does recognize that most of their works serve commercial development, residential subdivisions and capitol improvements to public infrastructure. Thus, they do a lot of ALTA surveys, construction layout, block and lot marking, and full roadway/street design from boundary to topo to engineering of transportation corridors. They are vibrant participants in their local communities and economies.

Finding surveying as a career field

Greg's journey to being surveyor did not start out with his seeking a career field. The son of Jerrell Bowers, a land surveyor from Harrisonville, surveying was the family business. It was a part of their way of living. Like so many sons and daughters of surveyors, Greg started out as a part-time helper to dad. But uniquely, this younger Bower

never imagined a future as a surveyor himself! Envisioning a possible career in education, and being academically inclined towards studies not generally associated with technical endeavors, the younger Bowers went to Central Missouri University and graduated with a degree in English. Supporting himself through college by working in a cabinet maker's shop he was introduced to CAD. Still joining his father in surveying between semesters, Greg turned his CAD skills to the family's business and a match was found. A match Greg thought would be temporary.

As time passed, CAD-for-surveying engaged Bowers and his career had begun. This chronology of starting in the drafting and researching for projects may be a career progression opposite of most practitioners, but it was a perfect fit for Greg. He could apply his academic skills in research and analysis and connect a project's full scope into the succinct expression of their compiled works, the plat. A career was found, but more than that, a *legacy* was continued.

Most memorable survey

While surveyors often recall a project or projects that greatly impacted their career, for Greg's "most memorable" it wasn't a particular survey, it was a period of time. Having gone on to buy his father's business, Greg became the owner of Bowers Survey Company in Harrisonville. The firm flourished while serving the outer reaches of the Kansas City metropolitan area and the open spaces of rural western Missouri. Then 2008 happened. The economic forces of the *Great Recession* meant layoffs for most of his staff. His regrouping which followed found Bowers not guiding others in the services which "feed-the-monster" of small business continuity; it found him doing it all. From client contact, to research, to field work, he and the remaining core of the firm did it all. The days of being a bigger operation, on bigger projects, deriving bigger revenues were over. But introspectively, Greg found this very time to be one he recalls in which he was happily "most in control, and most comfortable." He poignantly looks on this most memorable time in surveying as when he made the least money in his work, but found the most enjoyment in his work.

(continued on after Spring Workshop)

Significant influencers

Little in life is achieved without the guidance of others. For some it was a teacher, maybe a minister, possibly a parent. Most all surveyors have certain mentors whose steady hand and reasoned approach led them through their learning. For this son of a surveyor he of course marveled at the mastery of his father. He stood as a model surveyor for the younger Bowers, but there was also his father's good friend and family neighbor, Mr. Ray Frogge. Ray Frogge had his own career in surveying, and he was one given to reflection and serious understanding of that which must be done to execute a good job. He was also one of those good surveying hands who could reduce complexities into a simple, memorable *dictum*. There is one in particular that Greg Bowers remembers to this day and calls upon it in his own practice. As Ray would say it, "the worst decision by a man in the field, is better than the best decision by a man in the office."

Beyond surveying, Greg also benefited from the loving presence of his mother. A lady he describes as "...one of the hardest working people I have ever known", she gave even more than a mother's love. This surveyor found in this great woman the wonderful life lesson of accepting and caring without judgement. And this beloved mother's maternal integrity goes even further as she has been Greg's reliable and good counsel in all things, be *they* business or be *they* life.

Where to find future surveyors

Like all of those in this profession, Bowers is concerned with the aging of surveyors and the seemingly troublesome ability to bring new people into the trade. His thoughts on the matter may be less focused on "who" will be the next *gen*, but what we need in the next *gen*.

Bowers feels there is a place and need for people possessed of intellectual leanings aligned to liberal arts and other fields. As he learned from his own background as an English major in college and later earning a Masters of Business Administration, there are skills derived from other sources which would serve surveying well. Those learned in formal methods of research, analysis, interpretation and process have grounding in core traits for surveying. And an appreciation of applied history, the understanding of change over time with the mindfulness to not process the past in the terms of today. A guidance he reflects on regarding the importance of history and an assurance to work with quality is his own simple *mantra* of "someone will review my plats in 100 years and I want them to say 'I can count on this guy's stuff'".

Better than thinking about the issue of finding future surveyors, Greg upped the *ante* and provided one! His son, Nick Bowers is currently engaged as a surveying technician while obtaining the college credits required for licensure. As Greg did with Jerrell, Nick joined his father in the field as a youngster, and took to it like a natural. Greg describes himself as enjoying and being interested in surveying, but he sees his son as reflecting the grandfather more than the father. He proudly states Nick enjoys surveying, and he "is similar to my dad...he's intuitive [to surveying]".

Nick Bowers

Party Chief
Anderson Engineering, Inc.,
Harrisonville

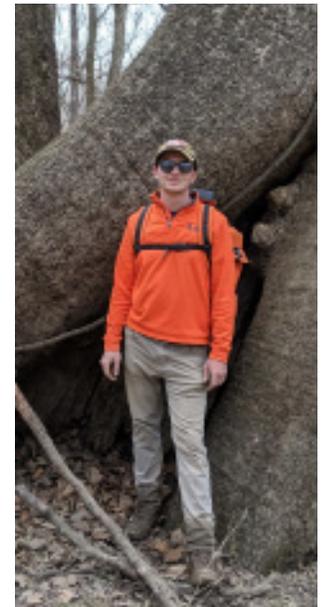
Focus of surveying practice

Nick Bowers actively works within multiple surveying disciplines on a variety of projects. Construction staking for property development and public works, ALTA's, right-of-way and topo's for highways, and best of all, rural property boundaries. Indeed, it is the main surveying function of property boundary surveys

which sparks Nick's interests and drives his desire to build a career in the field of his father and grandfather. The best part of his practice is found in being outdoors, and walking in the proverbial footprints of the GLO and preceding surveyors. It is augmented by the interesting research of historic documents, field books, GLO notes and township plats, old deeds and aerial photographs he pulls together and connects to locations on the land. Yes, it is an active surveying practice but more than that, it is an alignment of personal proclivities into professional pursuits.

What he likes about surveying

Nick is a self-described "outdoors kid" naturally drawn to wandering through field and forest. In surveying, he has found a way to both work and follow a passion. This is a surveyor definitely drawn to the field work. Beyond the field work, it is the application of history into a contemporary



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Father and Son Surveyors, Greg and Nick Bowers *(continued)*

undertaking. Young Mr. Bowers describes this as “getting in the mindset...placing myself in their world.” He time travels when delving into the records of the past and retracing the lines and corners of surveying predecessors. So effective are these journeys into the past that Nick identifies the methods, the ways of these ancients – even becoming accustomed to the particular original surveyors handwriting. It is the lure of the outdoors and the lure of the past which he likes about surveying.

Finding a surveying career, finding mentors

Nick Bowers is the third generation of his family engaged in the practice of surveying. Spending summers as a helper in the family business, he early on knew he had found a calling. A teenage Nick processed the experience as being “paid to walk in the woods.” Walking along behind his father, who had done the same in turn with his father, this young man is in the profound position of not only walking in the figurative footsteps of preceding surveyors, he has walked in the literal footsteps of surveyors before him as he once tried to keep up with father and grandfather.

Along the way, Nick also found guidance from a senior coworker, Mr. Ron Blacksmith. Like Ray Frogge was to Greg Bowers, Ron Blacksmith was to Nick. He was a well-versed, steady hand in surveying. What Nick fondly refers to as an “old school surveyor.” And what great lessons in surveying and life did he impart to younger Bowers? “He thickened my skin!”

Most memorable project

It is the memorable projects from which surveyors “take” the most. These are the ones which offer lessons, reinforce the surveyor’s connection to the profession, and make lasting impressions. So it is for Nick; he recalls two in particular –

The first is in the category of lasting impressions. In northern Vernon County, very near the midway point between Joplin and Kansas City is the Four Points Conservation Area. A very large expanse of wetlands and bottomland forests, there are property lines coursing through marshes and along waterfowl pools. Anticipating this as his favorite kind of survey, a rural boundary, Nick’s enthusiasm was temped once he hit the ground and began surveying in swamps. This was no longer his simple and joyful being “paid to walk in the woods.” It was tough, and it toughened him...yet it

did not deter him. He was still to be a surveyor; it left an impression.

The other? Well, with elements of family *legacy* wrapped up in fundamental principles of monumenting corners to bounds and following in the steps of those who’ve surveyed before, this one reinforced Nick’s connection to the profession. In his hometown of Harrisonville, the town where his family had operated a surveying practice across a span of six decades. A 19 year-old Bowers went to retrace the multitude of boundaries surrounding a nearby community lake. There were many changes in boundary courses, and the rocky terrain was challenging to marking and monumenting. But the project was made easy by the good works of a previous surveyor; it was one of those times he was following in the footsteps of a master practitioner. It was quality work. As he enclosed the project’s bounds, having made that most tactile of historical journeys by finding and touching the old rock piles and pins of the original surveyor, young Nick completed one of his earliest projects. It had been one of the earliest projects of the original surveyor as well, a then young Jerrell Bowers, Nick’s grandfather.

A surveyor with a Shakespearian tale

Learning the story of this *legacy* surveyor cannot be complete without its own drama of competition, conflict and coming together. It is a story worthy of comparison to that of the Capulets and Montagues of old Verona. The setting? *Two households, both alike in dignity, In fair Harrisonville, where we lay our scene.* In Nick’s case, the households were those of the Bowers Surveying Company and their local competitor in business, REO Engineering and its owner, Roy Obermiller. You see, Mr. Obermiller offered surveying services too. Not necessarily a problem, just a natural bit of being territorial always cast its shadow upon the two households. Again, not necessarily a problem...until one day at the local high school. On that day, our future surveyor met and became smitten with the *Juliet* to his *Romeo*. Yes, that lousy son of a Bowers fell for, then one day married the dear daughter of the dastardly Obermiller. And after a few years of side-glances and angry scowls from his father-in-law, Nick has put old animosities to rest while offering his own solution to the shortage of future surveyors. Yes, young Mr. and Mrs. Bowers have melded the two mighty surveying households of fair Harrisonville with their own little boy. A continuation of generations and another *legacy surveyor*. 🇺🇸



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