

August 2020

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August 2020 Newsletter

Dear NYS GIS Association Member,

Here are a few items of news for this month.

- Membership Renewal
- Meet NYS GIS Association Member: Bill Ostrander
- 2020 Awards for the Fight Against COVID
- 2020 Census Reminder
- Upcoming Opportunities & Events

Read on and enjoy,

The NYS GIS Association Communications Committee

Membership Renewal

June 30th was the last day of the 2020 membership year. Take a moment to renew your membership now and cross that item off your To-Do list before the summer gets away from you. You'll be credited right through to June 30, 2021.

Use this link to renew: <https://www.nysgis.net/joinus/join/login>

Know someone who is not a member? Please spread the word. The more members we have, the stronger an organization we can become.

Use this link to join: <https://www.nysgis.net/joinus/>



Meet NYS GIS Association Member, Bill Ostrander

- What made you interested in taking up GIS/geospatial technology as a career,

A tiny ad in the employment section of the newspaper got me into GIS. I needed a job and spotted this ad for a mapping technician at Weiler Mapping in Horseheads, NY. I thought, "How hard can mapping be?" As I learned, it can be quite challenging. When I called about the ad, John Trimber, whom many of you know, was surprised because he was planning on calling me – not about the job but about volunteering to help with a wetland project that Weiler was working on. He knew me because his wife had done an internship with me at Tanglewood Community Nature Center in Elmira and she later worked in my old position there. He had me come in and showed me around. His interview questions were perfect for me: "Will you take the job?" and "Do you want to work days or nights?"



Weiler Mapping's specialty was converting those old mylar tax maps into digital tax maps using AutoCad and digitizing tables. I got a little exposure to GIS there on other projects using ArcView 3.x. The last year that I was at Weiler Mapping, the company had been bought out by James W. Sewall Company and we transitioned from AutoCad to ArcGIS 8.0.

My GIS education began in fifth grade. We had a geography workbook that we went through that year and I found that very interesting. I became an avid birder when I was 12 years old. Studying species range maps was essential to identifying birds. In high school, my exposure to maps was primarily in history and social studies classes. My main use of maps in college was for getting around and traveling while I was an exchange student to Argentina. My college advisor, here in the U.S., was Ernest Hardy in the Natural Resources Department at Cornell University. He was very actively doing GIS by hand in Central America using aerial photographs. Coincidentally, his predictive hand-drawn maps of the future of agriculture in New York State were a resource for a project on my current job with Tioga County. Unfortunately, our minimal contact in my years at Cornell did not move me in the direction of GIS.

I came away from Cornell with a B.S. in Wildlife Science. When I landed my current job with Tioga County, I decided that I should know more about GIS, so I began working on a Master's degree through Penn State's online program. My goal was to complete the degree before I turned 60. I made it. I was 59.

- **Can you explain your job and what you do there?**

My current job is GIS Manager for Tioga County (NY). After my part-time assistant switched to working for the Real Property department full-time, I was the sole employee of the County's GIS Division (of the Information Technology and Communication Services Department) until two years ago. I maintain a large relational versioned geodatabase that is used by nearly all the County's departments. I also maintain a separate geodatabase used by 911 dispatch. I supervise employees and interns whenever I have them. I offer training classes to county employees and county agencies' employees, so we have people doing GIS most actively in Economic Development & Planning, Public Works, Real Property and Taxation Services, Environmental Health, Board of Elections, the Soil & Water Conservation

division additionally provides GIS services to the Law Office, the District Attorney, the Legislature, Tourism, Sheriff, Emergency Services, all 15 towns and villages, consultants, and anyone else who asks. It's lots of fun learning about what other departments do, helping them do it, and working with a large variety of data.

- **How did you get involved in the Association? Would you describe the many ways you have contributed to the Association over the years?**

I have attended association conferences and educational offerings for many years. My main involvement has been acting as the liaison between the Association and the Southern Tier GIS Users Group (STGUG) coordinating and often hosting periodic meetings of the regional group. I also participate in the regional coordination committee meetings.

- **How else have you shared your expertise in GIS with NYS programs?**

I'm still learning GIS myself, but I occasionally and informally share things that I already know with some of the GIS discussion groups, including the NYSGISA listserve. Infamously, I shared what I knew about the spelling of Biblical words in one post to the listserve. My only formal presentation was a preliminary presentation on my Master's degree capstone project at a GIS-SIG conference in Rochester. My project had to do with birds, and I was paired with Dr. James Kernan, Associate Professor of Geography at SUNY Geneseo, who was presenting on the Emerald Ash Borer. Our section was entitled, "The Birds and the Beetles." Dr. Kernan, when he was just Jim, trained me on using AutoCAD to capture tax map linework at Weiler Mapping.

- **What's the most interesting project that you have worked on and why?**

At Weiler Mapping, my most interesting project was developing a geodatabase structure for tax mapping in the New York City Watershed. I learned a lot about designing relational databases thanks to the model that NYS ORPS had developed using ArcINFO Workstation. The purpose was to help watershed counties and New York City keep track of the City's conservation easements throughout the watershed and to come up with a way of dealing with condominiums. My master's degree capstone project was also interesting. I developed a way to determine the importance of any area of interest based on criteria developed by Audubon New York and relying on available observation data. For Tioga County, the project prioritizing farm and agricultural land for protection gave me a chance to use the raster math that I learned in my M.S. courses.

- **What is your favorite memory from NYGeoCon or the GeoSpatial Summit?**

My favorite memory is from the first conference that I attended in Albany with a group from Weiler Mapping. One of our group, originally from Steuben County, introduced us to another attendee. After the introduction, he divulged that she had been his babysitter when he was a baby! The Summits have been great. We get to see technology that seems as though it is from the distant future, only to have everyone using it a few months later. I like the NY GeoCons, too, because of the workshops that are geared for local government. Presentations by MRB Group and Bergmann Associates staff especially stick in my mind.

I love being able to model real-world relationships with a relational geodatabase and then being able to see any of the data in the geodatabase on a map. Working for Tioga County has been great because everyone is so appreciative of what I do for them.

- **If you could visit any one place in the world, where would it be and why?**

I've had a chance to go to Argentina, Russia, Japan, and Taiwan. I would like to go to Costa Rica. The bird diversity is very high for such a small area, and I think the Costa Ricans are used to accommodating old birders like me.

- **Do you have any specific advice or philosophies from working in the GIS world?**

Clients usually don't really know what they want. Often they ask if I have a map of something and I say, "No, but I can make a map." Try to find out as much about what the client wants as you can. Make the product that you think they probably want and deliver it with the question, "What would you like changed?" Once they see the first product, they usually get a crystal clear vision of what they really want. Often you'll hit it on the first try, but when you don't, it's usually easy to meet their expectations on the next try or two.

2020 Awards for the Fight Against COVID

We have all endured the most extraordinary circumstances over the past few months. Every aspect of our lives has been affected. In response to these trying times, let's showcase some of the outstanding GIS work that you or your colleagues have been doing to help combat COVID.

Do you know someone who has stepped up to support GIS, an individual that has contributed to the betterment of the GIS community, or a person or team that developed an application or dashboard to aid in the fight against COVID here in New York State during the pandemic? Well now's your chance to nominate a colleague or your team to be recognized among your NYS GIS peers for their achievements!

***The deadline, *September 25th, 2020*, for nomination is just a month away!**



Submissions are now being accepted in two award categories related to how GIS has helped in the fight against COVID.

- **COVID-19 GIS Champion Award**
- **COVID-19 GIS Application/ Dashboard Award**

- [Awards Program Details](#)
- [Awards Nomination Form](#)

Winners will be recognized virtually at the NYS GIS Association Fall Virtual Event in October!

Please contact the [Awards Committee](#) with any questions.

2020 Census Reminder

Don't forget, you can still respond to the 2020 Census online at 2020census.gov by using a desktop computer, laptop, smartphone, or tablet if you haven't done so already. Encourage friends, family, and colleagues to complete the census form, which can be done safely, minimizing risks to your health and that of your families. Take a few minutes to be counted. It's an easy way to be civically responsible!

On Wednesday, 30 September 2020, field data collection will end and self-responses will close.

Let's make sure we are counted because your voice can help shape our state's future for the next 10 years.



If you know someone who has concerns about the Census have them check this website: 2020census.gov/en/news-events/rumors.html

[U.S. Census Bureau 3 August 2020 Press Release](#)

Upcoming Opportunities & Events

- Stay tuned for information about the Association's annual meeting.
- Fall NEARC Conference | Sunday, 15 November 2020 to Wednesday, 18 November 2020 | [More Information](#)

