

Lack of Interest in a Hydrographic Career

I was recently asked by Hydro international to answer, in the form of an Invited Reply, the question of why fewer people are choosing hydrographic surveying as a profession. Levels of students have diminished to a minimum. Interesting findings will be retrieved from the analysis of responses received from young, not so young (people like myself) and old hydrographers. However, I would like here to point out a few things beyond what I have covered in the coming column; the Invited Reply itself will be published in our next issue.

Hydrography has experienced gigantic changes over the past decade due to computer science impacting all fields of hydrography; digital charts, both ENC and DNC, the advent of multi-beam bathymetry, extensive employment of GPS technology, ROV, AUV, sub-bottom profiling and multi-sensor integration - especially for multi-beam bathymetry and electronic navigation. This is an enormously exciting field for any young fellow choosing a profession to work in.

All this technology available to serve a wide scope of activities related to water bodies has been developed through the years not exclusively by hydrographers but also by computer scientists, electronic engineers, mechanical engineers, mathematicians, physicists, geodesy specialists, cartographers, photogrammetrists, oceanographers and many other scientists. These have seldom had the experience of measuring with a theodolite during a whole rainy, cold and windy day, or sounding in an open small boat in harsh waters.

Although such scientists have done an outstanding job in creating all the wonderful gadgets and software we are enjoying today, they do not promote among youngsters the beauty of hydrography, but rather the benefits of their own specialities. At the same time, hydrographers working in many different and new fields of our profession have never acquainted themselves completely with the many aspects of what hydrography comprises at any given time, neither do they normally participate in R&D activities.

We active and old hydrographers have a role to play in reversing the diminishing interest in our profession. We should promote among new generations the multiple and exciting fields possessed by the discipline of hydrography beyond technical subjects and the mastering of the computer science needed. I refer to the spirit of adventure involved in our activities; contact with nature, travelling to exotic places, meeting people of different cultures, even within our own countries. Then there is the unavoidable involvement with the history of a location and the interesting and very often epic efforts of our ancestors in surveying so many years ago to produce the early charts of a place today resurveyed with modern technology. These aspects of our profession should provide a powerful tool in attracting young people to the profession.

International bodies also have a role to play in this scenario. IHO and FIG are, through the joint Advisory Board on Standards for Hydrographic Surveyors, the main organisations to develop and make available strategies not only for capacity building on existing resources, but also for winning new people to join us.