

Survey says! career not just for the fellas



Cynthia L. “Cindy” Skoriak, of Durham Township, is one of the 6% of land surveyors who happen to be women.

Cynthia L. “Cindy” Skoriak spends her working days in a job almost completely dominated by men. It’s also a kind of under-the-radar occupation that is a mystery to most people.

The Durham Township woman is a land surveyor, the only female surveyor I’ve ever known — or heard of, actually. Career experts claim only 6% of surveyors are women. It is a demanding career that is both science and art.

Cindy, both a mother and grandmother, is following in the footsteps of some noteworthy men who once made their living as surveyors — George Washington, Lewis and Clark and Mason and Dixon, for example. Land surveying is the basis for all our roads and buildings and division of parcels of land.

Cindy traces her interest in measuring land back to her childhood days.

“I was born in Oklahoma,” she said. “We later lived in Wyoming, Kansas and Illinois. My parents would frequently travel back to Oklahoma and I was that kid in the back of the station wagon reading maps to try to figure out exactly where we were.”

She believes a drafting class she took in high school also headed her in the direction of her lifelong career. And there was her native ability to be able to comprehend an object, to actually “see” it in three dimensions.

“That’s a gift,” she said, believing a person either has it or doesn’t.

Cindy graduated from the College of Wooster in Ohio with a degree in urban planning. She and her husband, Neil, moved to Durham in the 1970s.

A 40-year veteran in the field, she spent years stomping around through woods and hills and valleys with a team of surveyors calculating the height, depth, relative position and property lines of pieces of land.

She said, “I started out working in a three-person crew.” My lettering, my penmanship was good so I became the note keeper, making notes in a little yellow book. I got a lot of exercise.”

She works in the office now at First Order LLC, a surveying firm in Bethlehem, reviewing commercial plans.

STEM (science, technology, engineering and math) is big news in education today but it wasn’t when Cindy was in school. Her special love was geometry and that’s the basis of surveying.

When Cindy first started work, the tools were simpler than today; now surveyors use a digital theodolite, a kind of telescope that measures horizontal and vertical angles, and sometimes even drones. The principles, though, are the same as the ones used to lay out plans for Stonehenge in 3500 B.C.

Cindy said she only once encountered overt discrimination as a woman in a man’s field. She said it came from a municipal official who didn’t really know her or her work.

Male co-workers were always supportive and helpful, especially when she was new at the job.

“They were really patient in giving me time to learn,” she said.

She was to be part of a team and they needed her work to be very good.

Cindy is treasurer of the Lehigh Valley Chapter of the Pennsylvania Society of Land Surveyors. She has also served for years, either as member or alternate, with the Durham Township Planning Commission, work she said she has always enjoyed.

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