

# SURVEYOR

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*Women in Surveying*

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# Women in Surveying

## I Would Not Trade It For Anything

By: Marta Y. Alvarez, PE, PLS



In 1969, at the age of nine, my family emigrated from Chile to the U.S. to escape communism. It was not an easy task for a family of five to get a U.S. Visa. And it was even harder for us to leave everyone we knew, and everything we had, behind. My Dad had to come by himself first, to get a job and get established, before they would allow the rest of us to follow. It took about a year before my Mom, two younger brothers and I received visas and green cards to be able to join my father in Miami. In 1976 we moved again, from Florida to California, because my Dad missed the Chilean mountain views and thought California would be the cure. Even though this move was daunting in some ways it was also very exciting, as a teenager, to travel cross-country and see the sights from the cabin of a U-Haul truck.

I knew that I was going to be an engineer since I was a teenager. I didn't know if I wanted to go the mechanical, aerospace, systems, or civil routes that were offered at CSU, Northridge. What narrowed it down for me was the fact that I did not want to build weapons or be involved in defense systems. CSUN, at least at the time, was very connected with and funded by the aerospace and defense industry. So, without initially intending to I went the route that my father had gone before me – civil engineering. In 1984 I received a BS in Engineering and in 1999 an MBA, both from CSUN.

During my senior year at CSUN, and at the urging of one of my professors, a group of us entered a statewide engineering student competition that had a land surveying component. Even though our group did lousy on the traverse, I was hooked on land surveying from then on. Unfortunately, CSUN did not offer any land surveying classes, but I was determined to learn more about this profession that combined two of my favorite things: math and being outdoors, and, as a bonus, we got to use really cool tools.

While in school, and after I graduated, I gathered experience working for various consultants throughout Southern California, and learned that just about everything I did in engineering was somehow tied to surveying. Wherever I was working, I would ask the land surveyors to let me help with the survey portion of the projects I was designing. Many were very accommodating. Slowly, I learned as much as I could. I attended various seminars on land surveying, went to the Fresno and CLSA Conferences, and took as many workshops as I could. At night I took a land surveying exam review class and even sat down for the exam many years

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**H**i, I am Marta Y. Alvarez, president and founder of YCE, Inc. We are a small office that provides land surveying and civil engineering services. Our largest client base is in one way or another connected to the agricultural industry, but we also provide services to land owners, architects, and environmental firms. Over the past twenty years that we've been in business, we have been involved in survey projects that have taken us from Crescent City to San Diego, and from monitoring well sites, to cellular sites, to hazmat remediation sites, to environmental and water resource sites. It has been quite a ride (I would not trade it for anything) and I am not ready to get off just yet.

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prior to passing it, and prior to being ready, just to get the experience of what the exam was like. By this time I had passed the civil exam, but to me, it was not enough.

Unlike my father I had decided while I was in school that I would someday have my own company. At the time I had envisioned both of us working together, side by side. However, this part of my dream would not come true. After trying so many times it felt like I was hitting my head on the wall. I finally realized that my Dad and I could not work together. Maybe it was because I was too demanding of him, or simply because I was his daughter. I do not really know, and will never know now that he has Alzheimer's. I continued on with my dream, first working out of my house, then in a one-room office that I sublet from an accountant, and now to a slightly larger office that I share with a design firm. Next, I'm looking to buy a larger office building.



I have always believed in giving back to the community and helping our younger generation learn about what land surveying and civil engineering is all about, what it has given me, and how rewarding it can be. One way I have done this is by serving as a volunteer judge for the County's annual Science Fair for over fifteen years. I also volunteer for as many young career day functions as possible. One example is Brighter Horizons, a local event sponsored by the American Association of University Women. It is geared to enhance young peoples' awareness of careers in math and science and is a perfect example of one of the events that I truly believe is making a difference. I normally take all the survey equipment, some sample plans and more recently have added the CLSA outreach packets to display and give out to the kids. It gives me great joy to see how excited the kids are when they look through an instrument, ask interesting questions, or just to take one of my business cards as if it's the greatest thing ever. I am happy to give them just a little insight into the possibility of a future career that they might not have considered otherwise.

Because this is a male-dominated field (that has always been very rewarding to me), I have always had a soft spot for events and organizations that particularly promote the profession to young women. Whenever I discover such an opportunity, I am more than happy to help out. I hope that this article along with the others in this Women in Surveying feature of *California Surveyor* is such an example. ♦



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