

## **URISA Delivers Value for GIS Professionals:**

### ***THE URISA JOURNAL***

*By Greg Babinski, GISP*

"Here Greg, these may be of value to you. They're *URISA Journals* and they have articles about current research and trends in developing GIS. Maybe you can find some ideas in them that you can use for organizing our computer mapping and GIS." The speaker was Andy Datlen, IS Manager for the East Bay Municipal Utility District (EBMUD) in Oakland, California in 1989, shortly after I had been hired to supervise the agency's survey drafting and computer mapping system, and to develop its GIS capability.

I took the stack of about 15 issues of the *URISA Journal* back to the little 24" x 42" desk I had scrounged from surplus my first day on the job, and set them on the corner. I was an experienced supervisor, but I had come into a chaotic environment and I had a lot to sort out those first few weeks – staff personalities, office politics, budgets, management priorities, and many other details to 'get up to speed' before I could start putting my stamp on GIS development for EBMUD. But every day that first week I took an issue of *URISA Journal* home and read it through in the evening, then each day the next week another, and another....and they – and URISA – have made a lifelong difference for my career.

What did I find in those issues of the *URISA Journal*? I discovered that many of the challenges facing me as a new GIS supervisor were not new challenges at all. I discovered articles by experienced GIS managers and academics covering many of the technical, business application, organizational, and management challenges that I was facing. I discovered a wealth of ideas and opinions that I could use day after day, year after year in my career – to the present day. The *URISA Journal* made me much more confident as a manager and much more effective as a leader who was charged with implementing GIS and delivering value from the huge investment that GIS requires.

The *URISA Journal* (<http://www.urisa.org/urisajournal>) contains refereed articles and reports as well as book reviews, software reviews, and current literature reviews. Unlike other commercial GIS-related magazines published in print or on-line, each article in the *URISA Journal* must meet academic standards and pass review by the *Journal* article review board. Journal editors and review board members come from 10 countries spanning four continents and include managers and industry experts in addition to academics.

If you look at the contents of a typical issue of *URISA Journal* you will likely find some articles that are relevant to what you are doing, while others may seem not so relevant. But look more closely and think about how you might use those articles. For example, when I received Vol. 22, No. 1 (<http://www.urisa.org/files/journal22.1-web%20final.pdf>), I went right to the article by Jens Ingensand and Francois Golay: 'Task-oriented Usability Evaluations of a WebGIS for a Real-World Community.' This topic is relevant for our on-going interest in maximizing the value that county employees and citizens derive from our web mapping applications that we develop and maintain here at the King County GIS Center in Washington State. I made copies of this article and sent them to every web mapping developer and their supervisors here in King County.

There were also two articles in that issue about participatory GIS (Meng & Malczewski: 'Web-PPGIS Usability and Public Engagement: A Case Study in Canmore, Alberta, Canada'; and Boroushaki & Malczewski: 'ParticipatoryGIS: A Web-based Collaborative GIS and Multicriteria Decision Analysis'.) I sent copies of those to the team members that are working on a USFS grant funded urban-forestry climate change application here in King County. I sent a copy of an article about using GIS to plan radio networks (Gaber, El-Sharkawi & Nour El-deen: 'Traditional Genetic Algorithm and Random-weighted Genetic Algorithm with GIS to Plan Radio Network') to the radio shop in our ITS Division, and a copy of the article about an urban growth model (Estes, Crosson, Al-Hamdan, Quattrochi & Johnson: Validation and Demonstration of the Prescott Spatial Growth Model in Metropolitan Atlanta, Georgia') to some of our planners.

Were these articles directly relevant and immediately usable by all of these people? Maybe not all of them. But is our job as managers and GIS professionals to just keep our heads down, or are we leaders who should be challenging ourselves and our colleagues and coworkers with new ideas?

I have a long-standing goal here in King County to see the use of GIS within our health department increase. I know it will happen as more and more health professionals come out of academic programs that use GIS and geographic analysis for environmental health and epidemiology. But this goal was aided a couple years ago when *URISA Journal* published its special GIS in Public Health issue (Vol. 20 No. 2: [http://www.urisa.org/files/Vol20No2low%20res\\_0.pdf](http://www.urisa.org/files/Vol20No2low%20res_0.pdf)). I was able to send copies of this issue to the director and all of the managers within King County Public Health. No outreach or advocacy for the use of GIS could have made a bigger impact to this group of decision makers.

Several years ago, my job changed. In 2002 I took on responsibility as Finance and Marketing Manager for the King County GIS Center. What did I know about these subjects? Well...not much (other than serving several years as Treasurer of the BAAMA Chapter of URISA). As a condition of taking on this new responsibility, I joined the Government Finance Officers Association (GFOA) and the American Marketing Association (AMA). I immersed myself in training offered by GFOA and AMA, but the most valuable resource from these organizations is their publications: *Government Finance Review* and the *Journal of Marketing Research*. Both are directly relevant to my job and professional success. Indeed, I have now published an article about GIS technology in *Government Finance Review* and presented a paper on the same subject at the GFOA Annual Conference.

GIS professionals are knowledge workers. We are valued by our employers because we are knowledgeable about our technology. We are valued because we can apply our knowledge to the business areas that we support. We will have successful careers if we can apply our knowledge and research skills to the problems and business challenges we will face in the future. There is no more valuable resource for building our professional knowledge than the *URISA Journal*.

A stand-alone subscription to the *Journal* is \$295 per year. This cost is typical of academic, peer-reviewed professional journals. But subscription to the *URISA Journal* is included in your URISA membership. In my opinion, the value of the *URISA Journal* for a GIS professional far exceeds \$295 per year – the value of the *URISA Journal*...is priceless. Are you a URISA Member?

Thanks Andy - I still have those copies of the *URISA Journal* close by.

### **About the Author**

Greg Babinski, GISP, is the Finance & Marketing Manager for the King County GIS Center in Seattle, where he has worked since 1998. Previously he worked for nine years as GIS Mapping Supervisor for the East Bay Municipal Utility District in Oakland. He holds a masters degree in geography from Wayne State University. Babinski is the President-Elect of URISA – the Association for GIS Professionals.

### **More Information**

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