

# FSMS Pioneer Alvin T. Glover

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Members:  
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One of the most notable qualities about Alvin Gloer is that while his technical skills are exceptional, he is a humble man who doesn't quite see how his life could make for an interesting feature article. However, once the layers of his life are peeled back, many engaging stories are revealed, from multiple cross-country moves, a whirlwind romance, and overseeing the development of a game-changing website for surveyors, one quickly realizes that humble certainly does not equal boring.

## Early Influences

Alvin Thomas Gloer was born in Atlanta, GA on March 31, 1941, to Alton Gloer and Alma Cape Gloer. He had two brothers and one sister.

Their family lived all over the United States due to his father's military career. His Dad's home base during the Korean War was in Oahu, HI where Alvin, his mother, and siblings stayed while his father was in Korea. Alvin and his older brother, Alton Jr. lived with their Dad in Hawaii after the war.

"When I was about 12 years old, Dad was deployed to Germany. My stepmother took me and my brother to Atlanta to see Mom before we were to leave for Germany. We never left Mom's home after that until we were grown," said Alvin.

During Alvin's senior year at Russell High School in East Point, GA, he joined the Seabees, a Construction Battalion unit of the U. S. Navy Reserves. After he graduated in 1959, he was called to active duty on his birthday and joined Mobile Construction Battalion Ten on Guam. It was during his time in the Navy that Alvin trained as a land surveyor.

"I was a rodman on a survey crew building ammo magazines and base housing. My most memorable event was getting lost in the jungle on an overnight bivouac that took two days to find my way out," says Alvin.

Upon Alvin's return to the states in 1960, he came home on leave at Christmas and was introduced to his future wife, Shirley in Fort Pierce, FL. She was working with his mother Alma who set up the pair for a date for New Year's Eve.

They had a whirlwind romance and only seven days later eloped to Kingsland, GA to wed on January 8, 1961. They have been married for 60 years and have one son, Alvin T. Gloer, II, aka "Tommy" who was born in 1969.

After Alvin served his term in the Navy Seabees, the Gloer's moved to West Palm Beach, FL where Alvin worked for 10 years with a prominent survey and engineering firm while he also studied to become licensed.

## Licensure & A Dream Job

Alvin says of his time studying for licensure, "I attended Palm Beach Junior College, taking survey classes under a young new teacher named David Gibson. Our paths would cross often over the next 50 years. I worked my way up to party chief while studying for the LS exam. I studied mostly nights at home and in July 1971, I passed the test for my PLS."

The same year he became licensed, he also joined FSMS, then known as the Florida Society of Professional Land Surveyors. He has kept his membership current every year since and is one of the very few members who can boast of 50 years of consecutive membership in our society.

In January of 1972, Alvin managed the survey department for Marion Oaks, a new 16,000-acre subdivision being developed by the Deltona Corporation in Marion County, Ocala, FL.

During Alvin's employment in Ocala, he and Jimmy Chambers helped form the North Central Florida Chapter of FSMS. They coordinated with Bob Wigglesworth in Gainesville and elected him their first president and Alvin the first vice-president.

In a fitting full-circle moment, Alvin's former teacher, Dr. David Gibson had moved to the University of Florida during this time and became active in their chapter.

After 3 years Alvin obtained his Georgia surveyors license and began working as a project manager on the high-precision control surveys for the Metropolitan Atlanta Rapid Transit Authority with Towill Inc.

In 1975 that job led to a position as Assistant Office Manager of the Towill Inc. office in Clinton, MO. There he obtained his Missouri license in August of 1975 and was responsible for a dependent resurvey of 163 land sections to be used for a dam reservoir.

"This was the land surveyor's dream job," Alvin said. "We proved section corners that had not been visited since being set in the 1840s. I would do the field survey of a township at a time then come into the office and do the calculations while the office manager, who also was licensed LS would do the fieldwork for another township. After the section boundaries were determined we staked and monumented the reservoir boundary."

Moving to Missouri turned out to be a pivotal change for the Gloers. Alvin said, "I was living in a motel for about 3 months while waiting on my family to sell our Ocala house and join me. In moving to a town where I knew no one I was drawn to a small Christian church across from the motel. I started attending on Sundays and Wednesdays and when my family joined me, we continued our attendance. Through that church, we made friends that lasted a lifetime even though we were only there for about 3 years. We kept in touch and when our friends from church would come to Florida, they always called us and visited."

"Twenty years later we had the opportunity to visit Missouri and visited our old friends. The same Sunday school class was still meeting with all our old friends. They had a dinner in our honor, and it was like we had never left. That was one of the highlights of our lives. We never made another move that we didn't prioritize finding a church community right away," said Alvin.

An opportunity came up for Alvin at a firm in Ocala and they reluctantly left Missouri in 1977, returning to Ocala for the second time. Overall, the Gloer's moved to Ocala three times in their life and Alvin's wife Shirley says they aren't moving away again!

There, Alvin worked as the Survey and Office Manager for Brownell, Moger, and Associates, a practice which he soon took over and ran from about 1979 until 1995.

It was in 1979 that Alvin formed his own firm and hired Kelly Roberts to be his Survey and Office Manager. This was only the second position Kelly had been in and it turned out to be a fruitful one full of learning opportunities.

Their department was one of the first firms to have a desktop computer, the TRS 80, which was a truly robust piece of technology at the time, holding 64KB of memory capacity and a pen plotter.

Although Kelly and Alvin were not usually out in the field together, there is one moment that sticks out in Kelly's mind which illustrates Alvin's exemplary surveying skills. One day, they were out in Ocala National Forest looking for a section corner.

Kelly recalls, "This particular line that we were cutting was part of an effort to recover an old county monument that marked a section or ¼ section corner in or near the perimeter of the Ocala National Forest in SE Marion County. These old county monuments which were quite large (8" octagon concrete monuments, typically 4 feet in length with a brass cap) had been set by the Marion County Surveyor during the Depression utilizing funding under the Works Progress Administration (WPA) appropriated to keep folks working during that difficult time in American History. Retracement of the original government surveys (circa the 1830s and 1840s) for much of Marion County had occurred during this period."

"When looking back, this particular line that we had cut was through very thick vegetation and heavy overhead tree canopy making it extremely difficult to find our target. As I was running the gun, I had expressed to Alvin the difficulty of being able to see the target down that dark cut line. As part of Alvin's normal field gear, he had a handheld compass with a reflective mirror that was useful for signaling back in the day," Kelly said.

"The spot where we were set up with the instrument was in a small open area with little overhead tree canopy and we were bathed in a fair amount of sunlight," said Kelly. "Without disclosing what he was up to, Alvin pulled out his compass with the reflective mirror and after just a few seconds, managed to capture the sun's rays onto that mirror and reflect it down the dark cut line. Imagine my surprise when the prisms suddenly lit up as though a light switch had been magically thrown to light up the target."

From there they were able to quickly complete their series of positional angles and distance measurements to the target and could move up to continue their traverse in search of the monument, which they successfully recovered.

Alvin's career still held its share of challenges, as many seasoned surveyors can attest. His advice to Kelly held kernels of both truth and humor. "Pick something else as a career," Alvin said to Kelly on more than one occasion.

Despite the stressors of owning a business, Alvin was not the type to bring that stress into his home life. He treasured his time with his family and didn't allow outside circumstances to affect them.

His son Tommy remembers, "He is a very supportive dad. He did everything for our family. I didn't know a lot about how the business was doing, whether good or bad, because he didn't bring that stuff home. Business was business, family was family."

Alvin reflects on one of the best aspects of owning the firm, saying, "One of the most enjoyable times was when I had the opportunity to employ students from the survey program at UF as interns during their summers. I found this very fulfilling to be able to influence these young surveyors. There must have been a half dozen students that worked for me at various times. One of those students, David Melvin, has been a friend ever since and I often talk with him on survey matters."

David Melvin was referred to Alvin by his professor, Dr. David Gibson when Alvin needed a computer draftsman. Alvin's computer draftsman had left three weeks prior and when David arrived there was a pile 3-4 feet high of 3-wire leveling notes and he immediately started working through those.

"Alvin was very much of a technical kind of guy, probably one of the most technical surveyors that I had the pleasure of meeting back in those days. He was the first guy that had a computer in the community, and he had an HP-68, and he wrote programs for it," said David. "He always tried to stay on the cutting edge of technology. I would say that was one of his qualities is that he tries to stay on top of things."

## High Standards

During Alvin's early years, he participated in a committee chaired by Dr. Gibson, that developed the original Minimum Technical Standards (MTS).

Then as Dr. Gibson started teaching MTS seminars around the state, he asked the North Central Florida chapter to provide samples of real surveys to use as examples in his MTS seminars.

"I offered one, taken blindly from my file cabinet, that was widely used, and I am proud to say no one ever found a violation on that survey," said Alvin.

Upholding himself to high standards was a trait that Alvin always remained true to, even when the competition was tough. "My dad's word and his reputation have always been a big deal for him," said Tommy.

"I was looking at getting into surveying and my dad was getting underbid by people," Tommy said. "And I said, 'Dad, why don't we just find out what they bid, and we'll just bid \$50 less for each lot survey.' "And he said, 'Tommy, that's not how we do things. That's not the honest way of doing things. We have an unwritten code as surveyors that we price everything what it cost to do the job. It would be dishonest to do something like that.'"

Alvin's adherence to high standards and his strong integrity earned him quite a reputation. "In 1995 Terry Wilkerson visited my office and discussed a position open with the Department of Environmental Protection, Division of State Lands. He encouraged me to apply and when I asked about the salary, I thought I could not take that much of a cut, but later realized a sole proprietorship like mine was so volatile I might be better off at a position that had some retirement benefits. I put my business up for sale and sold it to the second person I approached, Diane Barrineau. Turns out it was the best move of my life," said Alvin.

David remembers that although there was stress during the ownership transition to Alvin, "Alvin handled it well, he was very adaptive to handling the situation, and Alvin's job was to run the office and keep the clients happy and that was not an easy job. He took it in stride and did very well with it."

Not only was Alvin influential to young surveyors like David, but he also had his son Tommy help out many times which had a profound impact on his life.

"My dad started me working with his company in the field when I was thirteen years old. It was cool and it gave me something to do during the summer. When I turned sixteen, I started running errands for him, going to pick up blueprints and dropping stuff off for people after school. During the summers, I was back out in the field," said Tommy. "I learned a lot about surveying, I learned a lot about life from the men that were on the crew. Most kids don't have that kind of experience. They have one or two men to look up to. I had three crews of three, so nine different guys to look up to."

Tommy received advice as well as many practical applications for life when he was out helping the crews. "I learned to drive in the crew trucks. The guys would be setting up stuff and they would say, 'go set those five monuments. Take the truck and drive out to the five points we just set and put those monuments in.'"

While Alvin was initially unsure of selling his business, he knew it was not destined to stay in the family. His son Tommy recalls, "His business was set up for me to go into it and I know that's what he wanted, but it just wasn't my thing. When I went into the Army, they made me an X-ray tech and I called my dad up and said, 'Guess what? I'm warm in the wintertime and cool in the summertime! I don't have mosquitos biting me or alligators trying to eat me.'"

## A Game Changer

Nick Campanile, a Board Member for Board of Professional Surveyors and Mappers, said, "I first met Alvin when I worked at DEP. He came in not too long after me, I started in late 1994. He came in a year or two later. So, we both worked together at the Bureau of Surveying and Mapping, in the Division of State Land at DEP."

"What he brought with him was much experience in the surveying profession. Alvin is currently a consultant through the Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services. He is an expert survey reviewer for surveys that come through probation, that come before the Board of Professional Surveyors and Mappers," said Nick.

At the State of Florida position, Alvin was hired to revamp the records of the Bureau of Survey and Mapping (BSM). On his first day, he was also assigned the Certified Corner Records (CCR) program, and along with that, LABINS (Land Boundary Information System).

According to the official LABINS site, "The Land Boundary Information System (LABINS) began in 1984 as a means for distributing survey-related data that is maintained and managed by federal and state agencies to the general surveying community. The original system was on main-frame computers that used dial-in modems for communications. The system soon migrated to the personal computer environment and delivered to surveyors on floppy disks and CD-ROM."

The program was developed by computer programmer Stephen Hodge who had been working at Florida State University under contract through the Florida Resources and Environmental Analysis Center (FREAC) Program to BSM. The CCRs were distributed by floppy disk and sold on a subscription of \$200 a year.

"It was sort of a nuisance program that no one wanted to manage because it was a law, for surveyors to file the records, but not enforceable. Participation was mostly voluntarily supported by surveyors and many simply ignored it. The distribution was very basic and cumbersome," Alvin said.

When Stephen proposed the idea to Alvin of posting all of this information online, Alvin recalls his initial skepticism. "One day after I started working with Stephen, he came to me and told me about this thing called the internet or WWW. He wanted to post our CCRs on a website. I told him I didn't see how this thing could ever last long! WRONG. We developed what is now widely known as LABINS.org."

Alvin felt that if he and Stephen were going to pull this off, they must distribute the information at no cost. Stephen confirms that as he and Alvin led the expansion of LABINS, Alvin was genuinely concerned about ensuring surveyors had access to the data.

"Alvin was eager, professional, and always stood by what he said. If something was in a file cabinet, Alvin wanted it out of there and in the system," said Stephen.

Stephen developed the site, and they originally posted the CCRs in a transcribed form. Soon Stephen was able to post an image of each CCR, so they eventually replaced the transcribed forms with images, which turned out to be much better and faster.

Alvin's responsibilities grew to include the state lands portion of the aerial photography program known as DOQQ (Digital Orthophotos Quarter Quadrangle.)

This was a program that partnered with the state's water management districts to fly aerial photos of the entire state on a 5-year rotation. These were provided to surveyors on request which Alvin eventually got permission to include on the LABINS site.

Next, he was given the Mean High Water (MHW) program when Doug Thompson retired, and they added the established MHW elevations and the formulas for computing MHW studies to LABINS.

"We continued to add information including digital photography and much more. When I left the state in 2007, it was the only site in the world that contained the volume of survey-related data available to surveyors for free," said Alvin.

## Active in Retirement

Faith and family continue to play essential roles in Alvin's life, with Alvin serving as an Elder and Bible school teacher as well as enjoying dinner with Tommy at least once a week.

"Well, I can tell you that he's the best dad still to this date that anybody could ask for," said Tommy. "He's a really good friend now instead of just my dad."

Alvin also continues his tireless dedication to surveying and still maintains his license and CEUs.

Despite some of the challenges that come with reviewing surveys, Alvin still collaborates with BPSM, analyzing surveys across the state for compliance with the MTS (now SOP) when a probable cause is determined after a complaint has been filed against a surveyor or survey firm. "Alvin comes to about every meeting and is still an active participant in expert survey reviews," said Nick Campanile.

Alvin said, "During this time, I have probably been one of the least favorite surveyors in the state. I take this responsibility seriously knowing that the result of my review can affect a surveyor's professional and financial life. It has been very challenging and even educational for me to see how the surveyors around the state approach a survey."

"My wife says during each case review, 'I don't know why you continue to do these reviews,' because of the time involved."

"My advice to the surveyor young and old is to never forget the first rule of surveying. 'Do every survey as if you will have to defend it in court!' I would amend that to read 'do every survey as if you will have to defend it to BPSM'."

"Records are the key to your professional life," Alvin said. "Most complaints are from clients that feel their surveyor has abandoned them."

It would be wise to heed this advice, keeping in mind that your surveys may one day undergo a review by the formidable yet fair, technically proficient, Alvin Gloer himself.