

Eastham has worked as surveyor for more than 30 years

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CHESAPEAKE, Ohio -- When Ronald Eastham has visited students for Career Day at local schools, he's brought up Mt. Rushmore.

Of the four presidents carved into that mountainside in South Dakota -- George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, Abraham Lincoln and Teddy Roosevelt -- three were surveyors. All but Roosevelt.



Ronald Eastham, owner of Eastham and Associates, was recognized Feb. 27 as the West Virginia Surveyor of the Year. [Purchase this photo](#)

Those revered presidents once had the role of going out and surveying land, marking boundaries and creating records for future generations. And that's what Eastham's Chesapeake, Ohio-based company, Eastham & Associates, does for the people of the Tri-State area.

Eastham has been in private practice for 36 years, completing 3,600 projects for residents, government and businesses, with clients such as the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, American Electric Power, Speedway and Chatham Steel in Hanging Rock, Ohio. And he was recognized Feb. 27 as the West Virginia Surveyor of the Year.

Though based in Ohio now, he's been a member of the West Virginia Society of Professional Surveyors since 1970, and the award is "in recognition of the extensive contributions and devotion to the betterment of the land surveying profession."

At the same convention, Eastham & Associates also received first-place recognition for maps entered into the national contest held each year by the National Society of Professional Surveyors, which is a member organization of the American Congress of Surveying and Mapping.

They're the most recent in a history of awards for the company, which has a staff of 20, including four registered surveyors, a registered professional engineer, CAD (computer-aided drafting) and field technicians and rod men and chain men. All of Eastham's six children with wife, Patricia, have worked for the family business, with three are still there.

Surveyors are called into service when a property line is not clearly defined or disputed, or when land is to be divided. It involves going out to the sites to find the boundaries and creating maps for the property owners and for the purpose of records.

Eastham & Associates does work in six states, and it's a job that takes teams into the mountains of West Virginia at altitudes of 2,000 feet above sea level, to a low-lying lake in North Carolina, below sea level.

Eastham went into the field because he enjoyed the outdoors, and has seen dramatic changes in surveying since he started working for the Corps of Engineers in real estate 36 years ago.

"At the start, we didn't have computers," he said. "We had to do it longhand and use trigonometry. ... Today it's changed so much. We survey by satellites."

These days, survey crews set up receivers. They use robotics and GPS.

Eastham & Associates recently determined a boundary in a lake in North Carolina, a bird refuge for the Fish and Wildlife Service. Crews were out in the swamp-like water searching for an underwater pipe that marked a boundary, which is where they set up one of their receivers.

Field Crew Chief Tim Ross was there. In his 20-year career, he's found himself in waders in a swamp, and scaling cliffs. He's had a gun in his face three times, and was shot at once by a man in a wheelchair.

"I've been shot at, threatened, run off," he said. "I've had heat stroke and been near hypothermia."

In the early part of the 20th Century, surveying was ranked as one of the 10 most dangerous professions, Ross said.

It's a job that grows on you, he said. At first, you might not be thrilled with the idea of treading in snow and sleet, or in places where you're likely to see snakes and bears.

But "At one point, you start thinking, 'This is interesting,'" Ross said. "I've been places that people haven't been for a long time. Then you find a pot patch and think, 'Wait, somebody's been here.'"

The mapping part of the job is something that Eastham is very particular about, Ross said, which is most likely why the company earns awards.

Eastham was born and raised in Huntington. He began working for the Corps in 1960 before opening his own practice, and the training he received in quality control was instrumental throughout the years in the final deliverable product to the public, he said.

"I believe people are called, and God opens doors for you," Eastham said. "I feel as he's opened doors, I've chosen to go through them. Even in these economic times, we have not had to lay anybody off. I believe we're blessed."

A member of Burlington Baptist Church and Gideon's International, he's a father of six, grandfather of 20 and great-grandfather of one. Eastham serves as Post Chaplain for the Huntington Post of the Society of America Military Engineers.

He was the charter president for the old Huntington Chapter of the West Virginia Association of Land Surveyors, also volunteering as the group's executive director from 1973 to 1976. He also has served as area director to National Society of Professional Surveyors, representing West Virginia, Virginia, Kentucky, Maryland, New Jersey, Delaware and Washington.

Surveying is important work, he said. It's retracing footsteps of those who have come before, and it's creating maps for record rooms.

"The better records you leave, the better it is for the public -- that's who we're serving and trying to protect," Eastham said.