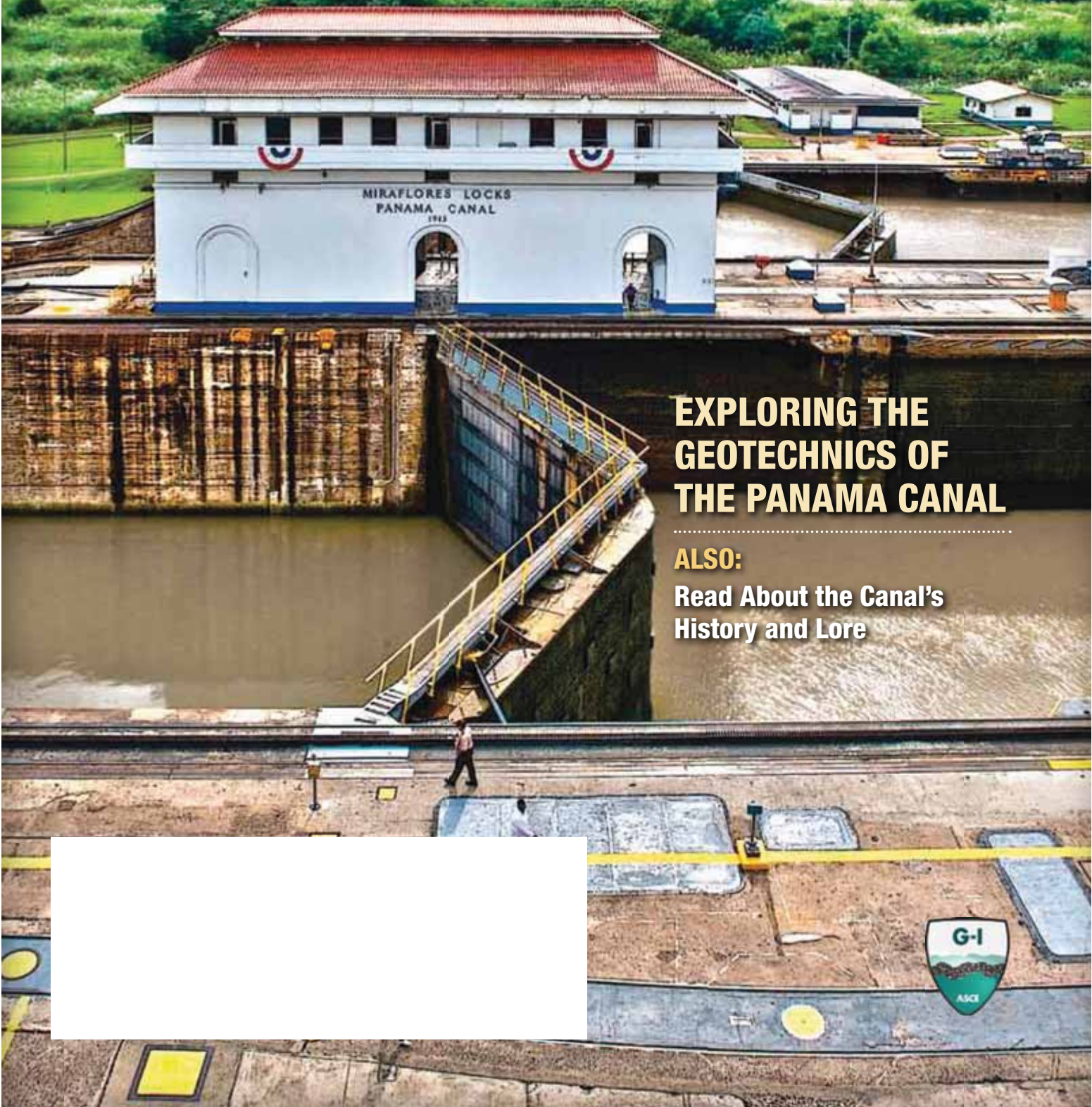




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EXPLORING THE GEOTECHNICS OF THE PANAMA CANAL

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The GeoCurmudgeon: Do As Hoover Did. Ignore What He Said.

By John P. Bachner

Most engineers are familiar with Herbert Hoover's 1954 article in *Engineer's Week* where he wrote:

"To the engineer falls the job of clothing the bare bones of science with life, comfort, and hope. No doubt as years go by, people forget which engineer did it, even if they ever knew. Or some politician puts his name on it. Or they credit it to some promoter who used other people's money with which to finance it. But the engineer himself looks back at the unending stream of goodness which flows from his successes with satisfactions that few professions may know. And the verdict of his fellow professionals is all the accolade he wants."

Great advice, huh? Come up with something really amazing, let everyone else take credit for it, and be blissfully satisfied with your public anonymity. And this from an engineer who, in his earlier years, had three full-time PR professionals on staff, vying to see who would issue the news release announcing that Mr. Hoover had recently sneezed.

Do as he did, not as he wrote, because what he wrote is justification for exactly the kind of behavior that has turned the 500-pound engineering gorilla into a 97-pound weakling. In fact, why do others get credit for something you did? *Because you let them.* I'm not suggesting that you give ultimatums – "Name this tunnel after me or wind-surf to work" – but, certainly, if you've performed the geoprofessional services for a significant structure, your name should be on the plaque honoring all those who clothed "the bare bones of science with life, comfort, and hope." Nor is it unrealistic to make such appropriate recognition an element of the consideration you require for rendering your services, especially given that, as President Hoover also wrote:

"The great liability of the engineer compared to men of other professions is that his works are out

in the open where all can see them.... If his works do not work, he is damned."

Some will contend that the risk of failure or alleged failure and the liability associated with it make *not* having one's name on a plaque preferable to recognition, in case someone wants to sue. How silly. Public records make hiding from a claim impossible and, that being the case, anonymity does not help geoprofessionals and most certainly does not help the geoprofessions.

Now consider the opposite approach. Imagine what would happen were the geoprofessionals of a community to actively court the news media, including the bloggers and Tweeters. The geoprofessionals could educate by

addressing the importance of what they do in construction design and quality assurance, in cleaning and preserving the environment, and in the support of sustainability and material reuse. They could develop robust news release distribution lists to keep all media representatives apprised of developments. And they could use their news release to also reach out to client representatives, profession and industry colleagues, and other businesspeople in the community. After all, if you fail to treat yourself and what you do as a "big deal," why should anyone else treat you and your accomplishments as a big deal?

Getting started in the PR realm is easy. Bearing in mind the dictum "News is what an editor thinks is news," take some editors to lunch. Ask, "What would you consider newsworthy? What kind of additional information might make even a somewhat hum-drum news release – about a new hire, a promotion, the award of a new commission, etc. – more usable?"

Self-serving? Sure it is, but it's profession-serving, too, because every geoprofessional is a representative of the geoprofessions. Admittedly, when just one geoprofessional issues one news release, it's just a professional squeak. But



when 20 geoprofessionals issue news releases on a regular basis, they create a roar that puts geoprofessionals on the local media's map. And the media then bring it to "the people," helping geoprofessionals get credit where credit is due.

Now imagine that happening in every community across the nation where geoprofessionals live and work. The results would be pretty amazing. And don't forget that your efforts to advance the geoprofessions in this manner would be a valuable byproduct of your efforts to advance yourself and your organization.

The notion that "the verdict of his fellow professionals is all the accolade [the geoprofessional] wants" is malarkey that justifies – if not glorifies – anonymity. Hoover himself never believed it for a second! He was a self-promoter *par excellence* and, because of that, he created an outstanding image for himself and a now-lost luster for *all* engineers.

You are a geoprofessional. You are a big deal. That's why you, like Hoover, should let *everyone* know who you are and what you do. It's about time you got the recognition you deserve from your fellow man, not just your fellow professionals.

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