Hello Readers,

Over the past year and into summer 2010, the BAAMA Board is making a number of back-office changes. I’d like to spend a little time covering some of these changes.

The first change, finalized in late 2009, is BAAMA’s adoption of the Google Apps platform for email and calendaring. With this transition all Board members now have an official “BAAMA.org” email address. The email addresses follow the format of “<first initial><last name>@baama.org.” Additionally, a generic email group for each officer has been established. For instance, the generic “treasurer” email address is “treasurer@baama.org.” As a result of these changes, any BAAMA member should be able to easily contact any member of the Board.

The second change is a new intranet site. For the first time, the Board has a centralized place to store a myriad of different financial and historical documents; this responsibility has floated to many different Board members over the past 20 years.

The last change is the migration of the BAAMA web site to a membership and content management system. The Wild Apricot CMS is designed to make membership management much easier. To date, managing the BAAMA membership has been one of the most challenging tasks that the Board addresses each year. From sending out the renewal reminders to confirming when a membership is renewed, managing the BAAMA membership proves to be a constant challenge for the Board. Although many of the advantages of the new CMS will only be recognized by the Board, I did want to briefly outline a few longtime BAAMA member requests:

ONLINE MEMBERSHIP APPLICATIONS
A prospective member will be able to sign-up for a membership online. No more sending in that pesky membership form!

MEMBER DIRECTORY
Each member will be able to see the contact information for all other members.

AUTOMATED MEMBERSHIP RENEWALS
Each member will be able to have his or her membership automatically renewed.

ONLINE PAYMENTS
All members will be able to pay with credit card using Google Checkout.

The Board hopes to have this migration complete by June 2010 — just in time for 2010-11 membership renewals.

Spatially yours,

Jeff Hobbs
2009-10 BAAMA President

UPCOMING BAAMA EVENTS

MAY
THURSDAY, MAY 27
PUBLIC HEALTH
8:30 am - 12:00 noon
Metropolitan Transportation Commission (MTC)
Meeting Organizer: Phil Beilin

JULY
THURSDAY, JULY 22
OPEN SOURCE VS. LICENSED GIS
8:30 am - 12:00 noon
Metropolitan Transportation Commission (MTC)
Meeting Organizer: Pascal AKL

SEPTEMBER
THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 23
Selected Topic TBD
8:30 am - 12:00 noon
Metropolitan Transportation Commission (MTC)

Check BAAMA’s website for more information:
www.BAAMA.org/meetings
BAAMA
CONNECTING PEOPLE WHO NEED GIS WITH THOSE WHO KNOW GIS

BAAMA is the vital organization of GIS professionals in the San Francisco Bay Region that promotes partnerships and teamwork with users of GIS technology to improve our environment and community. BAAMA is a proud chapter of the Urban and Regional Information Systems Association (URISA).

The mission of BAAMA is to be the primary forum of the San Francisco Bay Region geospatial community that provides education for professional development, networking opportunities, leadership, coordination, and representation — and have fun doing it!

BAAMA JOURNAL EDITORIAL BOARD
CATHERINE BURTON

KEEP US INFORMED
Please send us your comments, ideas, and news. If you want to write an article about your recent project, let us know! We are interested in pieces that educate and inform the Bay Area GIS audience of innovative projects using geospatial technologies. Content Editor — Editor@BAAMA.org

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BAAMA welcomes members to take volunteer roles in the organization’s activities! If you would like to get involved, please contact a board member!

Bay Area Automated Mapping Association
P.O. Box 71073, Oakland, CA 94612

A NOTE FROM THE EDITOR

When I am out and about in the world meeting other professionals, often times I am asked what I do for a living. Sometimes, I try to instant-audit the mind of the person asking me the question. This action is taken to identify with my questioner and determine his or her potential familiarity with the art and science of building maps. I have learned to do this because I have found a good portion of the population does not instantly register the word coming out of my mouth when I tell them I am a cartographer. Sometimes, they squint and sheepishly squirm, physically signaling they remember the word somewhere in the back of their mind; perhaps it was last brought up in a high-school classroom... If the squirming continues for longer than 15 seconds, I often feel compelled to say “I make maps.” Sometimes the questioner mines the word’s definition from the depths of their mind and seconds later, say “…you make maps?” And other times, the comprehension is immediate. Regardless of the duration of time between question and answer, I am usually warmly welcomed into their world with a big smile.

Commonly, a peppering of questions begins shortly after this initial interaction. Being a cartographer is a unique occupation; I find people are curious and a lot of the time, they have a special place in their heart for maps. Occasionally, if infrequently, I am posed with the rather cynical question, “hasn’t the world already been mapped?” And to be honest, for some period of time, I was stumped. On some level, it is true the physical world has by and large been mapped. However, I would not let this truth settle because the answer projected a bleak outcome for my chosen profession. Then one day it occurred to me: it is people that I map. Without hesitation, people relentlessly move and build and tear down and redistribute and level and settle the physical world. People like you and me contribute to and benefit from this constant spatial redistribution. It informs and inspires us, employs and engenders us.

As cartographers and related business people we are tasked to chart other’s experiences or needs of an area; we are commissioned to do this because we understand people and place uniquely. It is this special, spatial relationship between the map maker and the map, the person and the place that is the theme of this issue. Jason Castaneda writes about how an anonymous online map helped him find home. Steve Citron-Pousty discusses the topical relationship of neo- and paleo-geographers, open and closed source map making software tools, and why someplace in between these concepts may be the best place to be.

The BAAMA Journal editorship is my new place; I feel fortunate to explore this literary space as I am genuinely excited to hear from and read more about you. I know you help change and document the constant spatial redistribution of the Bay Area. I know you help make life here a truly wonderful place to work and be. I look forward to reading about your experiences with map making: the stories of building, selling, disseminating, evangelizing, teaching about, learning from, struggling by, and thriving with maps. Mostly, I look forward to appreciating how you change your space and how place changes you.

Sincerely,
Catherine Burton
Editor, BAAMA Journal
I am originally from the Bay Area. After almost 10 years of living in Southern California, first San Diego and more recently Los Angeles, I moved back. Now I live in Oakland.

I hadn’t spent much time in Oakland prior to moving here two years ago, but you can say making Oakland home was meant to be. This is because at some point, I realized that Oakland has more to offer than I previously gave it credit. My perception of the city changed during a visit of friends who lived in the Grand Lake neighborhood several years back. At the time I was studying geography at San Diego State University. For the first time I was learning about the how cities develop and the characteristics to compare them by.

If you haven’t had a chance to visit the Grand Lake neighborhood is located less than two miles northeast of downtown Oakland. If living close to downtown isn’t enough, other amenities such as Lake Merritt, the Grand and Lakeshore commercial corridors, access to BART, diverse communities and affordable rent should have you thinking twice about its value. Undulating terrain from the Oakland hills in the east to the San Francisco Bay in the west, provide views unique to the East Bay.

My building sits on the side of a hill. The windows face west with view of Lake Merritt, downtown Oakland, in the distance San Francisco, and Mt. Tamalpais. The Cleveland Cascade, originally built in the 1920s as a water feature, is the name of a park or “cut-through” (stairs) connecting my neighborhood to Lake Merritt below. It is a gem to the neighborhood for the people it attracts. Most of them exercise and some maintain the garden.

It is places like the Cascade that add quality and suggest a deeper look into Oakland culture and its neighborhood characteristics; curious to learn more, I looked-up more information about this place I live in. I found an on-line map entitled “Oakland, CA,” which remains one of my all-time favorite Internet discoveries.

The map identifies less than desirable yet colorful descriptions of neighborhood characteristics including diversity, crime, and gang activity in Oakland. At first you might think, “Yes, a crime map published by the Oakland Police Department.” However this is not a crimespotting.org production. Nor is it your typical java-based ArcWeb crime mapper we might be accustomed to seeing. This map was created using Google Maps and appears to have been authored by someone local (based on the intimate knowledge describing each featured neighborhood). It is also obvious the anonymous cartographer had no formal training in GIS. Nonetheless, the user-created on-line map is insightful, political, controversial, and provides information not typically published and accessible to the public.

Visually, the map is not impressive. My background in geography and professional experience within GIS qualifies my statement. Granted, the online tools within Google Maps lack sophistication, so to balance, my critique will be short. When the map opens, one can clearly see the neighborhood boundaries overlap in most areas, creating slivers discernible at the city level. Also working against the map is its generic title “Oakland, CA,” which does little to clue the audience in on what the person is attempting to illustrate.

As I began interacting with the map, its purpose became clearer. Its value is in the rich insight provided about each of
the neighborhoods. It intrigued me in the same way a documentary on urban street realities might, not only by describing harsh living conditions, but also juxtaposing such qualities as diversity and cultural events that are highly valued and rarely told from a map perspective. Combining the local knowledge of each neighborhood’s history and the micro-cultures within them, then pushing this information using open source mapping tools grabbed me for a couple of reasons.

Although the map breaks very basic cartographic principles, it helps me understand how my neighborhood compares to others in Oakland from a general safety and quality of life standpoint. More importantly, real value lies in the ability to broadcast information through open source map tools, enabling people to dialogue by presenting what they know and receiving feedback — balancing fact and opinion in a geographic context.

I recently tried searching for this same map on-line to no avail. Its life on the Internet was short-lived. What happened to it? Had it been censored for some of the negative light it cast on the City of Oakland? Luckily I downloaded the .kml file the first time I found the map. With it no longer available on the Internet, I feel compelled as an Oakland resident and GIS professional to build-on and resurrect this map that has added depth to my life in Oakland.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Jason has eight years of GIS, cartographic design, and environmental analysis experience within California. He has worked in both private and public sectors. His GIS and cartographic abilities include impact assessment, aerial photo interpretation, environmental variable analysis, and cartographic visualization and design. In addition, field impact surveys of ecosystems, data collection and analysis of environmental variables, and impact assessment of developments are his expertise. He has worked on numerous environmental, planning and transportation projects, ranging from habitat and vegetation analysis to planned community developments along with parking and traffic studies. His experience with various data management and graphic creation tools (including GIS, AutoCAD, Adobe, and Macromedia) provide a range of choices for exhibits. Jason has lived all over California and presently resides in Oakland. He enjoys exploring the urban and rural treasures the Bay Area offers missed while growing up there.
A few months ago, my wife and I were walking in the Presidio talking about one of the things I really enjoy about living in the Bay Area. Except for a brief stint in Georgia, I have spent most of my life in the Northeastern US. I mentioned to my wife that I like living in the Bay because the “roles” by which people identify themselves are much more fluid and heterogeneous out here. In general, back East it feels like people identify as a role — banker, computer programmer, or at-home mom — and then they live that role. Here in the Bay Area people seem to pick and choose the pieces that fit them and aren’t afraid to mix identities, one can find investment bankers who are also Yoga gurus or partial at-home dads who are computer programmers during the early morning and nights when the kids are sleeping.

This difference in US geography ties into some identities and changes that have been happening in the spatial world as well.

A recent change that has occurred is the delineation of neo- and paleo-geographers or neo- and paleo-GIS. As with all stereotypes it is a gross simplification but one that has been tossed around easily. If you have not heard of this division here is a quick recap:

neoGIS Grew up on Google Maps; talks about the ultimate app being how to find Starbucks® near you; think you invented the world when you made a heat map. Most of the adherents come from the internet world and use Open Source tools.

paeloGIS Grew up on desktop tools; talks about the ultimate app being how to calculate the velocity of subsurface water flows; thinks online mapping was just fine with ArcIMS. Most of the adherents come from the desktop GIS world and use ESRI or MapInfo tools.

I have painted the picture of these two groups as caricatures to highlight the differences. Of course there is a lot of variation in between the two poles. But, there is also some truth to these caricatures being the way each side is perceived by the other. I was at employed ESRI on the server team when Google maps came out and remember the discussions that first emerged: that’s not GIS; It’s not so hard to put pins on a map; Wow, that is kinda cool. The next year I was on Yahoo’s campus at the first WhereCamp and sat in on an introduction to GIS for non-spatial people. The session was highly dismissive of the desktop GIS tools: overpriced software that only does esoteric operations; we can do things better and faster; it is dinosaur software. After this session I was moved to write a blog piece decrying the simplifications and battle lines that had been drawn (June 3, 2007).

Sitting in an introduction to the OpenSource stack for WhereCamp it was kinda sad how dismissive this crowd can be of all that has come before. I think it is because most of them have not come from GIS they might feel like they have introduced all this new and great stuff. And while I agree they have definitely been pushing consumer based mapping light years beyond where it was. Their ability to do this has been made possible through the narrowing of the problem space. There is still a lot of mapping and “where” that happens outside of this space. I do think the traditional GIS crowd has somewhat brought this on themselves by portraying themselves as the “high priesthood” of GIS and if you don’t do follow along our path and do your time in the Monastery then you are not worthy.

I would characterize this period in history as the East Coast phase. People were for the most part, either in one role or the other — paleo vs neo, red vs blue... What I am really encouraged to see is that I think we are moving into more of a Bay Area phase. People are starting to loosen their identities and adherence to specific tools. We are starting to move into a “best tool for the job” era. We see examples of this throughout the spatial world. For example, Dave Bouwman using MS MVC.NET with ESRI ArcGIS server and its Flex API to create an award winning mashup of executive income versus county income. Or, Farallon Geographics, a traditional ESRI shop also building solutions using GeoDjango and Postgis to create workflows for the City of San Francisco. Counties and water districts still use ESRI desktop software and SDE but then using OpenLayers and MapServer for quick and dirty internal applications on top of Google or Bing maps. And, at the 2010 Where 2.0 conference you have PostGIS lead Paul Ramsey talking with NoSQL lead Mike Malone about how to bring spatial operations to Cassandra (the "datastore" behind Facebook).

At ICF, we are building a platform for one of our clients to enable field data collection and monitoring reporting (Figure 1).
involves field units including tablets running ArcPad, netbooks running a complete web stack, and Android handsets with simple forms. The ArcPad data is then handed off to our GIS analysts who have their workflows with ArcGIS desktop software. When they are finished they use ZigGIS and QGIS to move and edit the data into a PostGIS data store. The netbooks and Android handsets sync their data to PostGIS using simple custom web services. Once all the data is in PostGIS we use GeoServer with OpenLayers and GeoExt to serve the data back-up to the biologists and project managers for review. We also run nightly reports on the data using PostGIS and GeoServer and open source PDF libraries in Java. The GIS analysts create WFS and WMS ArcGIS layers from the GeoServer data source which are used for mapping and analysis. By centralizing all the data in PostGIS and GeoServer we ensure the authoritative data is in one location yet readable by everyone. When geographical edits need to happen to the data, the GIS analysts can use ESRI desktop software with ZigGIS to modify the PostGIS data using their normal day-to-day tools. We have entered the time of mesoGIS or meso-Geographers — in between the neo and paleo crowds with freedom to move back and forth fluidly. Now that I have moved to the Bay Area, with more freedom to be who I want, I can mix and match tools to come up with the best solution for my client, where “best” means different things to different projects. I am happy my professional life is starting to allow me more freedom to choose the tools I want to use. Enjoy the ride!

ABOUT THE AUTHOR
Steve is a technical director at ICF International. He has 7 years of Java programming expertise ranging from data processing and statistical analysis to ORM and web applications. He began doing geospatial work 16 years ago and has done geospatial programming work on multiple platforms using JavaScript, .NET, and Java. He has spoken at numerous conferences including JavaOne, AjaxWorld, ESRI User Conference, Where2.0 and SAP TechEd. Steve has also held a number of applied GIS and spatial technology research positions at deCarta, ESRI, Yale University, University of New Haven, and University of Connecticut. Steve holds a B.A. from Vassar College, an M.S. from University of Georgia and a Ph. D. in Ecology from University of Connecticut. He likes building interesting applications and helping developers create great solutions.

FIGURE 1. PostGIS Database. Best practice would be to have both dev and a production versions.

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Are you already a BAAMA member who’d like to get a little more involved? BAAMA welcomes members to take volunteer roles in the organization’s activities!

There are many reasons to be a BAAMA volunteer. Volunteering will increase your professional toolbox and enhance your resume. And, you will get to better know your fellow BAAMA members and board members.

Download an application form from www.BAAMA.org/application.pdf
WHERE IN THE BAY AREA?

This image inspires one to remotely sense in small and large scale. The lovely Bay Area spot you see here was once mined for basalt lava. Now it’s used to delight the senses and challenge the mind. Here’s a hint: this image may puzzle you. This NAIP image was provided to BAAMA Journal by Christian Raumann, GIS Manager at URS Corporation, Oakland.

Identify the name of the feature and preserve in this picture, and win a prize! And if you give the latitude-longitude coordinates that fall in this image, you definitely get bragging rights at the next BAAMA educational session! Send your answers to editor@BAAMA.org.

One lucky winner will be randomly selected from all correct entries received by September 1, 2010. The winner will be announced in the next issue, due out at GIS Day 2010.

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