



**FOURTH QUARTER  
2019 EDITION**



Intended Action:

Add rule regarding Military Family Jobs Opportunity Act Applicants

Purpose of Action:

To establish criteria for approval of applications for licensure as a professional engineer or land surveyor when the applicant is an "eligible individual" under Act 2018-540, as codified at Code of Alabama 1975 Sec. 31-1-6.

Language Added to Section:

(7) Licensure as a professional engineer or professional land surveyor is granted in accordance with the Military Family Jobs Act #2018-540 as codified at Code of Alabama 1975 Sect. 31-1-6, provided the "eligible individual" possesses a valid license or certificate in another state, district or territory of the United States, or in any branch of the United States Armed Forces, including the National Guard, with licensing and certification requirements greater than or substantially similar to the licensing requirements of the board and he shall be approved to work in his or her profession upon relocation to the State of Alabama for such time as normally allotted with receipt of a licensure from the board.

# BELS BULLETIN



AVERRETT

BALDWIN

VAUGHN

WALTON

*Entrusted To Serve the Citizens of Alabama*

## New Faces Join BELS

*Board welcomes new PE's and inaugural Public Members*

By Griffin Pritchard |

BELS Public Information Specialist

When the Alabama Board of Engineers and Land Surveyors convened its September meeting, nametags and introductions were included in the agenda as a quartet of new faces were tapped to fill seats at the table. John Averrett and Donald Vaughn are the Professional Engineer Appointments, replacing Liz Hyde and Richard Grace. And Elaine Walton and Nan Baldwin were appointed by Governor Ivey to be the first public members to serve as part of BELS.

"This is a new opportunity, and I'm still in the process of learning the full responsibilities of the board and my role and responsibilities in supporting the mission of the Board," wrote Vaughn in an email prior to the September meeting. "The Board has developed a stellar reputation as a highly professional body and I will perform my duties with honesty and integrity to preserve, and

See **FACES** PAGES 2 & 3

### BELS RENEWAL INFO

**BELS IS CHANGING TO A NEW LICENSURE DATABASE - RENEWALS WILL BEGIN IN LATE OCTOBER  
LETTERS WILL BE SENT WITH RENEWAL INFORMATION**

# FACES

From Page 1

hopefully enhance, that reputation.”

Nathan Johnson technically becomes the Board’s fifth appointment, after being reappointed to the Professional Land Surveyor position.

Johnson’s second term will now conclude in 2024.

Being appointed to BELS was not a choice made at random. There must be a desire to serve as each of the appointments were nominated through the various committees.

For Averrett, service itself is a reward.

“I have always been involved in community service and feel that giving back to your community is a very rewarding experience,” wrote Averrett. “As my engineering career has developed, my understanding of the importance of BELS has also developed. Seeing that I could give back to my community and still be in the engineering realm really appealed to me.”

Baldwin and Walton – representatives of the state’s business communities were appointed following the 2018 law change, Act 550-2018.

See **FACES PAGE 3**



Mayer Electric Supply Co., Inc.  
Celebrating 30 years with Mayer  
Supplier Diversity Manager  
Member: Women’s Business Council South



ALDOT Chief Engineer (Retired)  
2013 Engineering Hall of Fame Inductee  
2009 Auburn University Outstanding Alum  
U.S. Naval Reserves Corps Command (Retired)



Goodwyn, Mills and Cawood, Inc.  
Executive Vice-President  
(Electrical Engineering)  
Holds professional licenses in multiple states  
Member of GMC’s Political Action Committee



Birmingham Business Alliance  
Vice President, Regional Development  
Holds APR & IOM Credentials  
Leader in Birmingham’s 2013 All America City

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### THINGS TO READ

- Marc Barter talks about the importance of a good reference as part of the licensure process in Greyscale.  
(Pages 4 & 5)
- USA College of Engineering turns 50 and celebrates  
(Page 8)
- Nathan Johnson talks goals, new members and outreach efforts as he starts term two in Acquired Lines.  
(Pages 12 & 13)

### our MISSION

The Alabama Board of Licensure for Professional Engineers and Land Surveyors was established by legislative action in 1935. Its charter is to protect the public by helping to safeguard life, health, and property, and to promote the public welfare by providing for the licensing and regulation of persons in the practices of engineering and land surveying. This purpose is achieved through the establishment of minimum qualifications for entry into the professions of engineering and land surveying, through the adoption of rules defining and delineating unlawful or unethical conduct, and through swift and effective discipline for those individuals or entities who violate the applicable laws or rules.

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## FACES

From Page 2

“Whenever you have new members on a board, there are new perspectives, new energy and drive that moves the board in a positive direction,” Walton said. “Having met and interacted with the previous and new members, I believe that strong work relationships will continue to develop which will result in a stronger board with a vision to excel with their tasks at hand. I look forward to be a part of that positive drive during my tenure.”

For Baldwin and Walton, as the first public members, they will be setting the standards for public members to follow.

“My plan is not to recreate the wheel but with a fresh set of eyes and ears to understand how everything works together in order to make sure our (The Board’s) responsibilities and duties are accomplished,” Walton said. “The citizens of the State of Alabama deserve the best! This includes me, my family, as well as others I have and have not met but gave an oath to serve. Simply put, I will use my experience to give my best.”

Baldwin – who serves as the Vice President of the Birmingham Business Alliance – brings a different perspective to her appointment.

“My goal is to make a meaningful impact on the board by utilizing my skillset and experience in Community and Economic Development and Public Relations / Marketing,” she said.

“I also hope to learn as much as I can about the various engineering disciplines and the laws and codes of conduct that govern these disciplines to make wise decisions on matter brought before the Board.”

For as dynamic as their views on leadership are, the new board members bring different attributes to their appointments.

Vaughn, for instance, has worked his entire career in public service as part of the Alabama Department of Transportation. A Civil Engineer inducted into the Alabama Engineering Hall of Fame in 2013, served seven years as ALDOT’s Chief Engineer.

“I see Civil Engineering as a people-serving profession,”

he said. “My engineering career provided many professional opportunities and rewards, and I consider serving on the Professional Engineering and Land Surveying Board an opportunity to give back to a profession that was so rewarding to me.”

Averrett, an Electrical Engineer, holds professional licenses in multiple states throughout the Southeast: Florida, Georgia, Mississippi, Tennessee, South Carolina, Texas, North Carolina, Louisiana, Kentucky and Arkansas. In his current role as Executive Vice President-Electrical Engineering at Goodwyn Mills and Cawood, Averrett leads a team of six.

“I plan to use my experience with BELS to further educate fellow engineers at companies I am associated with about the importance of licensure and the ethics associated with it,” wrote Averrett.

What Baldwin and Walton bring to the table is something new.

“In Economic Development,” wrote Baldwin, “our primary role is to grow and improve the economy of a community by expanding and retaining businesses, creating jobs and providing workforce development opportunities to enhance the well-being and quality of life of its citizens.”

While Baldwin isn’t an engineer – her career has proved to be profession adjacent.

“On a daily basis, I work on infrastructure projects that lead to the betterment of the communities we serve,” Baldwin said. “As a board member I will assure the citizens that the buildings, roads, bridges and facilities which make up the infrastructure of our State will be designed by the most highly qualified engineering and land surveying practitioners that come before this board”

Walton, for the past 30 years, serves as the Supplier Diversity Manager for Birmingham’s Mayer Electric Supply Co., Inc., is involved heavily with Women’s Business Council South which allows her to walk in different professional circles.

*“The citizens of the State of Alabama deserve and demand the best! This includes me, my family, as well as others I have and have not met but gave an oath to serve. Simply put, I will use my experience to give my best.”*

Elaine Walton

*“I plan to use my experience with BELS to further educate fellow engineers at the companies I am associated with about the importance of licensure and the ethics associated with it.”*

John Averrett

# GREYSCALE

## The importance of references



*Marc Barter*  
Professional Engineer

*Judgment calls are part of the process*

“The reference who opines that the applicant is not quite ready for licensure is using judgment to make an assessment of an individual ...”

In my seven plus years on the board, I have observed more than once the supervisor reference for a new license applicant, opining that the individual is not ready for licensure. My first reaction is that this has to be an honest sincere person who takes their obligation for truthfulness seriously. It must be especially difficult for them if this individual is still under their management. No doubt there will be a change in the relationship and maybe, just maybe, a change in an individual.

The licensing process depends on truthfulness and commitment on the part of the references. Some embrace the role and make a good faith effort to provide an accurate assessment of the person who asked them to vouch for them, and others, maybe not so much.

The task becomes a box to be checked during an overloaded workday. To provide a less than glowing reference for someone who has trusted you to support their goal of attaining licensure, or even dispute their fitness for same, takes courage. People in general, with some exceptions, desire to avoid conflict. Providing a bad reference will not get you on the subject's Christmas list.

The stakes for granting licensure are high.

What the board is doing is granting an individual the right to practice a profession without internal oversight.

What we are effectively doing is affirming the new licensee's ability to prepare documents, seal them, and submit

them to a building department, planning commission, or owner for use in construction, land planning, or as the basis of an insurance adjustment or litigation. In many cases, there is no second set of eyes until it's too late.

When that seal is placed on the document and it's issued, it's highly probable that the last “knowledgeable” party in that subject matter just finished reviewing it. All reviews or observation from that point on will be cursory.

A recently released university study compared maturity levels of the current generation with past generations and found, basically, arrested development. This shouldn't come as a great shock to anyone, especially those with children.

If you can't cast that critical eye at your own, cast it at friends of your own to make the revelation more palatable. The question, while obvious, must be stated for purposes to be discussed, “How does this relate to licensing?”

The appropriate use of a license is based on a three legged stool as we like to say: education, experience, and examination.

There is a fourth element that doesn't really fit our paradigm, unless we are adding a leg to our stool, judgment. Judgment is what keeps calamity from poor practice at manageable levels.

Judgment keeps the neophyte structural engineer from attempting to design the high rise building, or that neophyte



## References: 330-X-7.02

- (1) The applicant shall furnish, on the application for licensure, five reference names; their addresses and, if licensed, the jurisdictions in which they are licensed.
- (4) All references should know the applicant personally and should be able to issue judgments concerning the applicant's experience, ability, character and reputation
- (6) A current member of the Board cannot serve as a reference for an applicant.

## REFERENCES

From Page 5

electrical engineer from designing a power distribution for a new college campus.

And, while these examples might seem over the top, the area between what you know and what you don't know has to be clear to you. To practice safely you must have the judgment to realize it, and judgment comes with maturity and experience.

The reference who opines that the applicant is not quite ready for licensure is using judgment to make an assessment of an individual, often in their charge, and always known to them.

If this assessment is done in a forthright manner and with genuine concern, and the overwhelming majority are provided in that manner, it provides the board with a reasoned argument as to why this person is not ready for licensure.

In my experience, there was a case where the board had reason to question the motive behind the poor reference, which we did, and I believe we eventually arrived at the right decision.

If the university study on maturity is accurate, what will the future of licensing look like?

Currently, we can, and sometimes do, license an individual who is as

young as 26 years old. I'm not sure the boards in the past were that comfortable with it, but that's the law. (I say boards in the past because the board was just increased from seven to nine members and four of the nine members are new, with only one meeting having taken place.) And we all must admit that not all people are the same.

I have known 40 year olds that should not be allowed to hold a sharp knife, so judgment cannot solely be tied to age.

The law is not likely to change the experience requirement, so we will continue to see some young applicants, and we will no doubt continue to license them and pray that we have made the right decision.

What we also pray for is that their supervisors and references take their roles very seriously when it comes to providing a reference.

The Board does not release reference information; however, an applicant may be able to determine who provided a specific reference (good or bad) if the reference is also an experience verifier. This very real possibility makes a less than flattering reference even that much more courageous.

Another emerging trend of rejected applicants is the "don't take no for an answer" approach.

Nearly every meeting now, we have one or more applicants denied licensure appearing at a hearing. Some are due to not answering a question on the application truthfully such as have you ever been convicted of a misdemeanor or felony.

Funny how people forget they spent time in prison (not really), but there are others that stretch the limits, usually attributable to youthful indiscretions.

In order to protect the public, the public must protect itself, in the form of licensed engineer references. As unpleasant as this might be, the board depends on your honest assessment and willingness to do the right thing. And with the emergence of the "but why?" trend, you may very well have your opinions exposed to the applicant.

To that you must say "so be it".

Your duty as a supervisor or reference should be to the public and to the profession, as well as the applicant.

They have asked you to endorse them and you owe them an honest assessment. One way to look at it: If you can cobble together 6 people from family and friends, your pallbearers are covered, and you can leave this earth honestly. No need to curry favor or bend your ethics.

As part of NCEES National Meeting, a discussion point focused on outreach efforts going forward.

Events like Future City, DiscoverE, Trig-Star and Math Counts were highlighted as different opportunities and avenues to reach a younger audience to help build their interest in the professions of engineering and surveying.



# NCEES looks at outreach opportunities

*Group gathers to discuss audiences and messages to help professions grow*

By Griffin Pritchard |

BELS Public Information Specialist

Tasked with creating a marketing program that would attract students to the professions of Engineering and Land Surveying, the Public Outreach Task Force took a deep dive into best practices and came up with a catalogue of ideas and the best way to reach them.

According to Public Outreach Committee Chair Lance Kinney (P.E. / Director Texas Board): “The task force was appointed by NCEES President Jim Purcell (now Immediate Past President). Without putting words in his mouth, I believe the underlying goal was to review what NCEES was doing regarding outreach to different target audiences and to get input, feedback, and ideas from practitioners and staff from around the various state boards about how to improve communications. There are many states doing many things, but we’re not always sharing those successes and building on the ideas of others. In its presentation during the 2019 meeting, the Public Outreach Committee provided their “recommendations for promoting and enhancing outreach messages and activities to the various NCEES and member board audiences.”

Essentially – the goal is to target different audiences and figure out the best ways to interact and get them excited about engineering and surveying. Surveying – the national shortfall, particularly – was the first audience targeted on their list. Surveying students are typically different than engineering students by two factors: 1) they are typically older than a generic college student coming from a military background, community college or having spent time in the workforce before seeking secondary education and 2) they often are considered nontraditional with families and live off campus. So, given that – how do you reach that demographic.

“This particular item was discussed and made a focus of discussions,” wrote Kinney. “Our action items in most cases were developed jointly for engineering and surveying – we need to talk to students in K-12 about both professions. We agree that it is important to talk about surveying as an important field that students and

- Kinney: “Each state is working on various outreach programs. Here in Texas (I’m most familiar with our programs) we have implemented ethics/law and rules webinars as well as a state-wide outreach program.”
- In Alabama, as well as Nebraska, for instance, the message has been divided to three unique audiences: professionals, college students and the general public. Depending on the event, the presentation will change to best suit those in attendance.

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**BELS Reception**



To recognize their years of dedicated service to the people of the State of Alabama, BELS paused its September 10 meeting to host a reception for departed Board Members Frazier Christy (top with Joseph Breighner and Elaine Walton) and Richard Grace (bottom). While recognition was at the top of the menu - Nathan Johnson presented the plaques - the reception also served as an opportunity for new board members to meet and receive last-minute advice from their predecessors. Christy was replaced by Breighner and Grace was replaced by Don Vaughn.

**OUTREACH**

From Page 6

practitioners should consider as a career path.”

But – to reach surveying students – a boilerplate approach will not work as oftentimes, they are a unique group: Older than the typical college student, typically living off campus, may have a family and too, possibly already has a working relationship with a professional land surveyor.

With that said, social media and advertising in trade publications are two of the tactics discussed. Also, the group considered utilizing peer power and reaching out to on-campus societies.

The problem with college students, most of them are already fixated on a career. So, the goal – the group determined – is now to reach to students on the K-12 level. Programs geared toward youths are already in place: Future City, TrigStar, MathCounts and DiscoverE.

“Last year, we ended up focusing on students – both K-12 and University, and K-12 ended up being the bigger discussion point,” wrote Kinney. “The idea was that we need to get kids interested in engineering and surveying as part of STEM efforts, as part of the professional ‘pipeline.’ Ba-

sically – if you don’t have students on the K-12 level interested in the professions, they won’t go into those areas in college – hence no graduates, and then no professionals.”

While on the college level, it seems outreach efforts are trying to play catch-up, reaching down to the student level provides a wider variety of resources to help influence the future minds that will go on to shape the world around them. So what’s next? What’s the plan to reach a generation known in some circle as “digital natives” and others as the iGeneration?

According to Kinney, the biggest accomplishment to date has been having K-12 outreach efforts made a part of the NCEES position statement on education.

“This year’s committee will continue ideas and efforts from last year,” he wrote, “and will be looking at some concrete programs and suggestions that states can take an implement. In addition, we would like to see what NCEES can do regarding sharing resources, as well as additional marketing / development / research in ways to target a ‘younger’ audience.”

	# Engineer Undergrads	# Undergrads	# Freshmen	# Grad Students
Auburn University	7,087	24,628	1,373	998
University of Alabama	6,162	33,030	1,222	321
UA - Huntsville	3,174	7,101	628	374
University of South Alabama	1,358	10,405	289	63
Alabama A&M	987	5,143	276	N/A
UAB	952	13,877	114	701
Jacksonville State	506	7,321	82	N/A

AUBURN University



Seth Maddox may become a valuable resource to his professors in the Samuel Ginn College of Engineering at Auburn University.

The Freshman member of the Auburn family from Geraldine, Alabama, this summer was crowned the PowerPoint National Champion, besting more than 350,000 competitors in June in Orlando.

He qualified for the competition the day before the deadline.

“I’m a technology guy myself,” Maddox told AL.Com. “I like computers, I like Microsoft Office. It was just a good fit for me.”

Maddox won a \$3,000 scholarship and a trip to the World Championships in New York.

His dream job, he tells AL.Com, is to work for a big tech company like Intel, Google or Facebook since they now have data centers in the northern part of the state.

## USA Engineering celebrates 50 years

By Griffin Pritchard |

BELS Public Information Specialist

What grew from a faculty of one, has turned into a calling card for the University of South Alabama. In April, the College of Engineering celebrated its 50th year as a college.

What began under the guidance of Admiral M.E. Eaton has prospered to a school with 50 full-time positions and four academic departments: Chemical and Biochemical engineering; Civil, Coastal and Environmental engineering; Electrical and Computer engineering and Mechanical engineering.

In total the school features five baccalaureate degrees, four master’s degree programs and a doctoral program in systems engineering.

To honor this feat of longevity, USA held a 50th anniversary gala in April.

Dr. John Steadman: “As we mark this occasion, we want to honor our alumni, corporations, foundations, faculty and staff who have made a lasting impact on the college and the engineering profession.”

Steadman, for the past 18 years, has served as the College of Engineering dean. The school is ABET accredited and started the fall of 2019 with 1,400

freshmen (67 graduate students) entering the program. A survey of grads revealed that 97 percent would strongly recommend the USA College of Engineering program to others. But that’s just a recent survey – the USA College of Engineering has 50 years of success to build on. In that half century more than 6,000 degrees have been awarded: 4,700 to undergrads and 1,300 graduates. Success can be measured in different ways, take Shelby Hall for instance. According to the press release sharing the school’s great news, Shelby Hall has been the College of Engineering’s home since 2012. The 155,000-square-foot classroom and laboratory building contains 63 laboratories, 17 classrooms, three large multimedia auditorium classrooms, five computer labs, five student study areas and seven student design rooms, offices for faculty and staff. USA has one more thing to be proud of as William B. Burnsed, Jr., a 1972 College of Engineering graduate donated \$1.5 million to the college which, going forward, will be named the William B. Burnsed Jr. Department of Mechanical Engineering.

# Embrace the Grey to Understand Ethics

*Not every situation has a cut-and-dry answer*

By Griffin Pritchard |

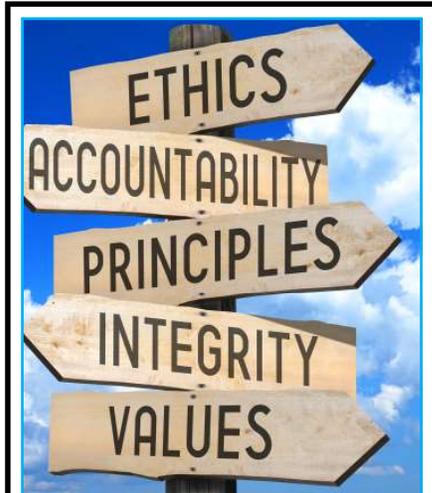
BELS Public Information Specialist

Paraphrasing what Michael Davis, in his book *Thinking Like an Engineer*, wrote: “A code of ethics ... prescribes how professionals are to pursue their common ideal so that each may do the best she can at a minimal cost to themselves and those they care about (including the public). The code is there to protect each professional from certain pressures (i.e. the pressure to cut corners) most other members of the profession would avoid.”

To better frame this conversation, consider that in Alabama there are around 19,000 licensed professional engineers, professionals land surveyors and companies offering the practices there of. That numbers (when looked at as three separate license categories) fluctuates depending upon the economy and the renewal period. While that equates to 19,000 different professional experiences, journeys and sets of business plans, the one commonality is that they are – every day – confronted by an issue that will make them question their professional judgment.

Case in point: “A buddy offers (The Professional) tickets to the National Championship game.”

See **ETHICS** PAGES 10 & 11



- “Engineers and Surveyors are in a position where they must balance time with financial constraints and to do this, they must have both a great deal of thoughtfulness toward their career and a great amount of ethical fortitude...”

The more novel and difficult the ethical choice we face, the more we need to rely on discussion and dialogue with others about the dilemma. Only by careful exploration of the problem, aided by the insights and different perspectives of others, can we make good ethical choices in such situations.



## SITUATIONAL *Understanding*

1. Could this be damaging?
2. Does it involve alternative outcomes?
3. Is this about more than what is legal?
4. What facts have i gathered?
5. Can I learn more about the situation?
6. Do I know enough to make an informed decision?

**BELS FOURTH QUARTER OUTREACH EVENTS**



After a busy and non-stop summer, BELS outreach has begun to dwindle down. Griffin Pritchard attended the Alabama Association of Fire Chiefs in August, an event that was suggested due to the Board's relationship with the state's Fire College. Following that, in October, Pritchard traveled to Pelham as part of the ASPLS Winter Conference. The event brought together Professional Land Surveyors from throughout the state for two-days of professional training.

**ETHICS**

From Page 9

As innocuous as that seems to be on the surface – in terms of ethics – a bit more of a dive must be taken.

Is the buddy offering the tickets to his buddy that he's known since college or is he offering them as business owner to elected official with the "clandestine promise" of work to be granted? The first – buddy to buddy – does not violate the canons of ethics. The latter scenario – if a complaint is filed – will put both the individual offering the gift and the professional accepting the gifts in the crosshairs of BELS' investigative committee.

Welcome to the Grey Area.

While there is no exact Webster's definition, a roughly crafted one says

this: "It's the area between two mutually exclusive states where the border between the two is fuzzy at best. Situations that often fall into this category – especially those tied to ethical mores and norms – often have no exact answer."

The answers typically are something along the lines of "Yes, but or No, maybe."

Paraphrasing a quote from the Markkula Center for Applied Ethics at Santa Clara University: "The more novel and difficult the ethical choice one faces, the more there is a need to rely on discussion and dialogue with others about the dilemma.

Only by careful exploration of the

problem, aided by the insights and different perspectives of others, can we make good ethical choices in such situations."

As a professional, does the situation confronting you pass your own ethical litmus test? Do you know enough about the situation to make an informed decision?

Could there be an alternative outcome? Don't hesitate to reach out to a peer or your regulatory board.

Hibbett Neel, the founder of the engineering firm Neel Schaffer, said this: "Nothing is more critical to the prospect and the sustainability of an engineering organization than it's good name. However, every day, engineer-

See **ETHICS** PAGE 11



**Reminder**

**PROFESSIONAL LAND SURVEYORS MUST COMPLETE A ONE-HOUR ETHICS COURSE EVERY YEAR AND A FOUR-HOUR COURSE ON THE STANDARDS OF PRACTICE FOR LAND SURVEYING IN ALABAMA EVERY TWO YEARS.**

A grouping of one-hour OnDemand webinars have been added to the BELS website to be used for PDH during this renewal cycle. To receive your certificates, please send an email to griffin.pritchard@bels.alabama.gov at the conclusion of each webinar, stating when it was completed.

Available now are:

- Commodore Steel Case Study
- Law and Code: Act 550-2018
- An Ethical Conversation (Ethics)

For our PLS licensees, the SOP will be available Nov. 12 and broken down into four separate, one-hour videos.

While ethics are a key chapter of the BELS Administrative Code, they are also fundamental to the operation of several other professions throughout the world. As foundational ethics from myriad professions - law enforcement and public safety, education and administration, the medical field and the lawyer community - commonality in the guiding language can be found.

For example, "Seek first to do no harm," is often within the first few lines of code.

<p><b>1. Hold Paramount Safety</b></p> <p>... hold paramount the safety, health and welfare of the public and strive to comply with principles of sustainable development in the performance of their professional duties.</p>	<p><b>2. Knowledge</b></p> <p>... shall perform services only in areas of their competence.</p>
<p><b>3. Speak Truth</b></p> <p>... shall issue public statements only in an objective, honest and truthful manner.</p>	<p><b>4. Act like a professional</b></p> <p>... shall act in a professional manner when working as a faithful agent for matters regarding employers, employees or clients and shall strive to avoid all conflicts of interest</p>

## ETHICS

From Page 10

ing organizations put their reputations at risk because they don't fully understand or appreciate the ethical implications of employee conduct at all levels. The many years an organization has spent building its reputation and brand can be lost in an instant because of the actions of one employee or the organization itself."

Essentially – it's easier to change jobs than it is to rebuild a high-level reputation once the foundation underneath it has crumbled.

Businesses who offer to practice and the professionals who are individually licensed to do the work are bound by professional ethics and the obligation as a professional engineer

or professional land surveyor to "be cognizant that their first and foremost responsibility is to the public health, life, safety, property and welfare." That's the paramount message for them to understand: Seek first to do no harm.

But if harm is knowingly done, then it falls on them to be courageous in their decision making and heed the call of canons of professional ethics, for those keeping track at home) to come forth with information regarding the practices of legal bad actors.

If the act is not reported, then the original professional committing the bad acts may not be the only one with the eyes of the Investigative Committee shining brightly on them.

# ACQUIRED LINES

## Changing perspectives and dynamics



*Nathan Johnson*  
Professional Land Surveyor &  
Professional Engineer

*New members bring new views to BELS*

“I am hopeful that these new public members will challenge the status quo enough that BELS will take a fresh look at how we do things and, more importantly, why we do things.”

Every Board is a little unique, since the members bring their own perspective, experiences and knowledge to each meeting. In the past, our board members have exclusively been practitioners or retired professionals, but with two of the board members being public members not associated with either the engineering or land surveying professions, then this will change the dynamic and the discussions somewhat.

I am hopeful that these new public members will challenge the status quo enough that BELS will take a fresh look at how we do things and, more importantly, why we do things.

Does our current approach consider what is in the best interest of the public?

How can we be more efficient and effective?

With the addition of the two new public members, the Board has increased from seven to nine, with five being engineers and two being land surveyors.

Of the now nine board members, there are four that are new board members.

I want to help them (the new members) get oriented into their new roles and responsibilities as a regulator of the professions and protector of the public.

This transition takes time, so I would like the veteran board members and the staff to be a resource to the new members to help answer questions, explain general con-

cepts of how we govern, etc., so that these new members will have the confidence and the knowledge to carry out their duties.

While having so many new members can be a challenge to the status quo, it is important that the Board of Licensure is viewed by both the public and the professionals as consistent, dependable and slow to change.

The men and women that have served on past Boards, together with input from the staff, have set precedents, etc., that have allowed the Board to carry out our mandate to protect the public health, safety and welfare by enforcing the law through disciplinary proceedings and by establishing minimum standards for determining the qualifications of applicants for licensure.

As a Board Member, we must be mindful that these long-held positions and policies were well reasoned and are now relied upon by the public and the professional practitioners, so any changes could have unintended consequences and should not be entered into lightly.

### **OUTREACH:**

The Board and staff continue to improve our outreach to the public, code officials and students across the state with the goal of educating them on the importance of utilizing professional engineers or land surveyors or taking the steps to become one themselves.

## U.S. SMART CITY *Expo*



A progressive Alabama was introduced on a world stage as part of the Smart City Expo held in Atlanta in September. Smart City Expo World Congress – the first held in the United States – provided the opportunity to learn about “smart” technology and how to make a city function as one. Topics, according to the event’s website, included infrastructure and transportation, economic development, technology, cybersecurity, energy and sustainability.

Alabama stepped to the forefront during the Connectivity Through Smart Neighborhoods panel. Alabama Power, and its sister company Georgia Power, presented a completed version of a Smart Neighborhood found at Reynold’s Landing in Hoover. According to an Alabama Newscenter report, additional neighborhoods are currently in development in Auburn and Atlanta.

Reynold’s Landing, which opened in May to fanfare from the tech community, features the first microgrid (operated by combining a mixture of solar panels, battery storage and a backup natural gas generator) in the Southeast.

In Georgia, Altus at the Quarter is the name of the “smart” townhouse development and will feature a power grid supplemented by rooftop solar installations and in-home batter storage.

According to the Alabama Newscenter report: “all homes in Alabama Power and Georgia Power Smart Neighborhoods are designed to make customer’s lives more comfortable, convenient and connected through features that can be managed by smartphones and voice activations.”

## PERSPECTIVES

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There is always more to do in this area and, with the Board having the new members, I would like to see us continue to improve in this area.

### **CHALLENGES GOING FORWARD:**

One of the great challenges to BELS is the national push to deregulate professions.

Over the years, there has been a tremendous increase of regulations that is now restricting trade and the public’s ability for employment.

While some licensing boards truly protect the public’s health, safety and welfare, other regulatory boards play a limited role protecting the public’s interests and may be placing an undue obstacle to trade and commerce.

So, in light of the national trend to challenge the need for professional boards, BELS must examine our practices and policies to see if we are not just acting in the public’s best interest but that we are acting to protect the public by means, methods and procedures that may not be readily available through the civil courts or free trade.

There is a balance that the Board must maintain.

We are not here to protect the professions and the practitioners by restricting competition or trade; or to settle disputes that are best handled in civil court; or to continue expanding the umbrella of regulatory oversight into all disciplines of engineering and surveying when these areas do not pose a vital threat to the public.

We must focus on our own mission and let that guide all of our actions and decisions.

# ENFORCEMENT ACTIONS

## Sept. 10 Meeting

**2019-20 | Yong C. Shao, PE 31143**

An investigation determined Mr. Yong C. Shao, professional engineer, placed his signature and professional engineer seal on the electrical, plumbing and mechanical engineering design plans that were submitted to a City Building Official that were outside his area of competency. Mr. Shao agreed to a consent order that required him to pay the Board \$445 for the cost of the investigation to pay the Board a \$5,000 fine, and his license to be suspended for two years with that suspension stayed.

**2019-08-C | Verrick D. Green, Un-licensed (Green Builders and Construction & Engineering Design)**

The Board received a complaint in reference to Mr. Verrick D. Green an unlicensed individual operating a firm that had the term “Engineering” in its name without meeting the requirements of Title 34 of the Code of Alabama.

A formal hearing was held on July 24, 2019, at which Mr. Green did not attend. At its September 10, 2019, meeting the Board reviewed the recommendations of the Administrative Law Judge, and issued an Order that stated Mr. Green was guilty of the charges against him, and required the following penalties:

Mr. Green must pay a \$5,000 monetary civil penalty to the State of Alabama General Fund, Green Builders and Construction & Engineering Design must pay a \$5,000 civil penalty to the State of Alabama General Fund, Mr. Green must pay the Board \$251.25 for the cost of the hearing and he must cease and desist the use of the term “Engineering” in his firm’s name, advertising, website and marketing efforts.

## July 16 Meeting

**2018-13-B | Joseph M. Burnett, PE 23090**

The Board received a complaint in reference to Mr. Joseph Mark Burnett, professional engineer, possibly violating Title 34 of the Code of Alabama.

The complaint indicated he provided an “as-built” survey for a project that was altered from the originally approved design without providing the required application and documentation.

A formal hearing was held on May 8, 2019, at which Mr. Burnett participated. At its July 16, 2019, meeting the Board reviewed the recommendations of the Administrative Law Judge, and issued an Order that stated Mr. Burnett was guilty of the charge against him and required the following penalties:

Mr. Burnett must pay the Board a \$3,500 fine and his license to practice engineering in the State of Alabama was suspended until March 26, 2020.

Mr. Burnett appealed the Board’s decision to the Montgomery County Circuit Court.

**2019-19 | Guigen Wang, PE 25637**

An investigation determined Mr. Guigen Wang, professional engineer, placed his signature and professional engineer seal on the electrical, plumbing and mechanical engineering design plans that were submitted to a City Building Official that were outside his area of competency. Mr. Wang agreed to a consent order that required him to pay the Board \$445 for the cost of the investigation and a \$5,000 fine, his license was suspended for two years.

### FY 2019 Complaint Statistics

2019 Received	PE	PLS	Un-Licensed Engineering	Un-Licensed Surveying	Total
	15	5	11	0	31
2019 Resolved	PE	PLS	Un-Licensed Engineering	Un-Licensed Surveying	Total
	20	5	17	2	44