

## **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR UPDATE**

By Bob Samborski

### **AUTOVATION OFFERS GITA MEMBERS OPPORTUNITIES, BENEFITS**

For nearly a year now, GITA has been in close contact with Utilimetrics, a non-profit educational organization formerly known as the Automatic Meter Reading Association (AMRA). They changed their name to Utilimetrics several years ago to better reflect their focus on the various automated technologies beyond automated meter reading (AMR) and Automated Meter Infrastructure (AMI) that were being employed in electric, water and, increasingly, gas utilities. Utilimetrics produces a major annual conference separately branded as 'Autovation', a synthesis of automation and innovation.

It became obvious that GITA needed to make major changes to its current business model, the predominant element of which has been our annual Geospatial Infrastructure Solutions Conference. Since the first major conference and exhibition in 1989, GITA's annual conference achieved a reputation for excellence in the geospatial industry as a valuable educational event and an excellent place to find new business. Times have changed, however, and so have the needs of our members and constituents.

Geospatial technology has been adopted and refined over the past decade by organizations of all types, many of which are highly experienced and mature users. Whereas these organizations initially came to GITA's events to learn about GIS and to develop a network to implement new applications, these basic needs have long been satisfied. The primary challenge for these organizations these days is how to leverage their investments in technology to find ways to make their various disparate systems work together more effectively.

GITA's new direction must now be focused on those user needs – and, to that end, working with other organizations to more effectively meet our members' needs is more important than ever.

The burgeoning relationship with Utilimetrics is a primary example of what GITA is doing to focus on the future. The Smart Grid is an area that will require intense collaboration if this rapidly emerging technology arena is to reach its full promise. GITA's conference program in Grapevine, Texas earlier this year featured several sessions and presentations on the role and importance of geospatial technology to Smart Grid implementation. Utilimetrics was invited to host one of the featured plenary sessions in April and GITA is reciprocating by organizing a geospatial track at the Autovation conference, scheduled for September 25-28, 2011 in

Washington, DC. In addition, the two associations are engaged in ongoing discussions about how to combine resources to better serve our respective constituencies. I expect that these discussions will lead to a thoughtful approach to keeping the AMI/AMR/smart metering and geospatial communities better informed about each others' capabilities and shared interests.

The Autovation 'umbrella' offers an opportunity for both associations to identify a new niche for education about interrelated technologies in utilities and, to some extent, in local government. Initial conversations with members from both associations indicate that, while there are still some gaps in understanding the specific technology connections between geospatial and AMI, the general vision is that these technologies – as well as other technologies used in the same utilities – are or will soon become interrelated and mutually supportive.

For those GITA members who see technology convergence in their future, I would urge you to give serious consideration to attending Autovation next month in Washington. GITA members will receive preferred registration rates, and GITA corporate members will be able to secure exhibition space at a special member rate as well. Follow the link on the main page of this week's New Hub newsletter to learn more about this opportunity.

The collaboration with Utilimetrics and the Autovation conference is one of the several new developments that we are undertaking to position GITA for the future. Plans are actively underway to produce an event in the Spring 2012 timeframe that will build upon the critical issues that were discussed in the Industry Trends Analysis Groups (ITAGs) as part of the last two annual GITA conferences. I look forward to updating you on what GITA is doing to improve its services and to remain a relevant and trusted source of information and education for you as we collectively address the significant challenges – and opportunities – that lie ahead.