Case Study:
GIS: A Matter of Life and Death
City of Kissimmee, Florida

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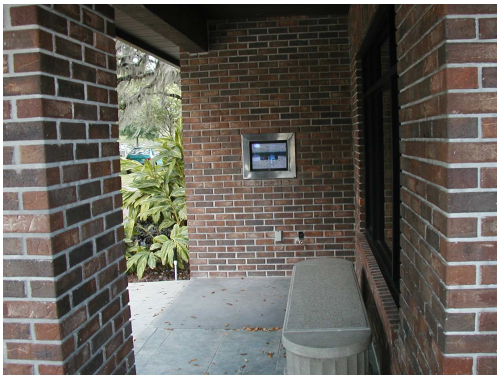
Few inventions have enjoyed the widespread acceptance and popularity of touch screen technology, but even early adopters might be surprised to find a kiosk in one rather unlikely place: the City of Kissimmee's Rose Hill Cemetery.

"Actually, it makes perfect sense," said Tony Curtis, the City's GIS Manager. "We use GTG's MapTouch™ technology to get the data into a format that allows visitors to search for a specific grave, to find available spaces, to research costs, to get all the basic information they need. Since most people come to cemeteries on weekends, when our staff is not here, the kiosk is the ideal way to let people help themselves." Curtis said the popularity of genealogy has fueled interest in cemetery records, resulting in even more visitors to the cemetery.

And, while using the technology to map cemetery plots is a new application in Kissimmee, GIS is not. The City began its program in 1993 with all custom applications.

"In the late 90's, our focus turned to making GIS more usable," Curtis said. "The custom applications required a lot of expertise to operate and maintain, and that just wasn't practical for us. I saw a presentation by Curtis Hinton on the Seven Keys to GIS Success and was really impressed with Geographic Technologies Group's (GTG) approach to the planning process. We hired them to do a needs assessment and then a lot of things began to happen at once."

Curtis said the GTG team examined every process and interviewed people throughout the City.



"One interesting thing they found was that the Building Department, which is on the first floor of City Hall, has more than 10,000 walk-ins a year, and most of the requests are repetitive. The idea of a kiosk was the perfect solution for that," he said.

Once the needs assessment was complete, one of the first applications Kissimmee implemented was the Desktop Internet Browser Solution (DIBS).

"GTG totally customized it for us and every department uses it. This was one of the biggest changes for us. It was the first time we were going to the Web for information, and it was very quickly accepted by the users."

GTG's GeoManager took the Community Development database of addresses and converted it to GIS layers, enabling the City to map crimes, building inspections, code violations, and occupational licenses.

Curtis said each department found its own uses for the technology:

- The Parks and Recreation staff uses DIBS to analyze community growth patterns to see where new parks might be needed, and to research where there are vacant lands available;
- The City Manager was able to determine who owned the land under consideration for a homeless shelter, and the properties adjacent to it, from his desktop;
- The Planning Department can easily generate mailing labels for property owners who will be affected by requests to rezone parcels; and
- The City Attorney can see who owns the land in areas that will need to be expropriated for road realignment.

"The list goes on forever," Curtis said.

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During the 2004 hurricane season, still other uses for DIBS were found. "Determining whether a property is in the flood zone can be done about ten times faster with GIS. And, when our building inspectors went out after the storms they were able to input information about damaged property and that became part of the database. We can look at our maps and see exactly where the paths of destruction were."

A year ago, the City of Kissimmee extended GIS technology to its Public Safety Department with LGdispatch, a mapping interface which provides E-911 dispatchers with an interactive map displaying the location of all active emergency calls.

"We started with the address database from Kissimmee Utility Authority, and the incident would map to that address, but we only used it as a back-up because finding the right location was a matter of life and death. We considered the first year a pilot, and cross-referenced the KUA database and the data we've gathered through the 911 addressing project underway in the county. We haven't found many discrepancies, but we wanted to be cautious."

Because the LGdispatch installation was successful, Kissimmee is piloting LGmobile in 10 police cars. Eventually, they hope to use the system in all fire and police vehicles city-wide.

"It's been an exciting time to be a GIS manager. Every day there's something out there that helps us do our jobs better and give citizens better service," Curtis said.

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