

Post Independent

Glenwood Springs Post Independent - Valley News Engineers Week honors profession that's especially important in Roaring Fork Valley

*Ryan Graff
Post Independent Staff
February 25, 2005*

A group of overworked and overlooked folks should have been basking in the glow of a week just for them. But for all the stuff engineers know, most weren't aware that this is Engineers Week.

"I guess I just don't recognize when I'm being appreciated," Derric Walter, an engineer with Boundaries Unlimited in Glenwood Springs, joked on Tuesday.

"I think it might be like secretaries week," said Chris Manera, an engineer who answered Colorado River Engineering's main line in Rifle on Tuesday. "I'll take myself out to lunch."

Though engineers didn't realize it was their time to shine, that doesn't mean they don't deserve the spotlight.

"Behind every step forward in human life stands an engineer," John Browne, president of this year's Engineers Week, wrote on eweek.org.

"We do lots of things nobody really thinks about," said Louis Meyer, president of Schmueser Gordon Meyer in Glenwood Springs.

Engineers' work allow residents of the Roaring Fork and Colorado River valleys to take a clean drink of water in the morning, drive to work and jog across bridges, Meyer said. And all that work isn't easy.

Engineers, for example, can design a bridge that won't move an inch, no matter how many trucks rumble across. But a bridge that sturdy would be prohibitively expensive, said Chris Chen, an SMG design engineer.

The same engineers could also make a bridge very cheaply and safely that would sway with each roll of a truck's tire.

"It's not going to fall down," Chen said. "But people don't like that."

The challenge, then, is to strike a balance between sturdy enough to make people comfortable, and economical to build.

Amazingly, engineering could be getting even more difficult, especially in the valleys surrounding Glenwood Springs.

Many of the obvious, and good, places to build have been developed already, Meyer said. The open places are often sloped and have soils that are less than ideal for development. Transportation engineering suffers from the same pressure, with narrow canyons and little room, he said.

All that growth affects other resources - notably water.

More growth leads to less water. And decreased water quantity can lead to decreased water quality because suddenly a constant level of salts, minerals, and even pharmaceuticals increases in proportion to the diminishing river water, Meyer said.

Well-engineered water treatment facilities can help reduce pollutant levels, he said.

Even with growing engineering challenges, most engineers seemed to revel in a job that allows them to participate in the community, especially when it comes to the environment.

"There are lots of environmental entities in the valley, and we're one of the few entities that gets to do something about it," Meyer said.

Others even think an engineering career might have kept them in line.

Warren Swanson, a SGM project engineer, is an environmentalist and works on water treatment facilities for municipalities. He thanked engineering for keeping him practical.

"You can't just be a total idealist, you have to be practical," he said.

"I might have ended up some wacky longhair if I didn't have it to temper (the environmentalist) side of me."

Happy Engineers Week.