FACES IN THE CROWD

Katy geophysicist helps locate graves

Lawrence Gochioco donated time to Heritage Society

By KAREN HASTINGS
CHRONICLE CORRESPONDENT

YOU might say Lawrence Gochioco knows where the bodies are buried.

Also the abandoned mine shafts, sinkholes, leftover oil and gas pipelines and multimillion-dollar mineral deposits. If it's buried underground, this Katy geophysicist can help find it, often with the use of his "portable digital multi-frequency source electromagnetic system."

In July 2008, Gochioco used this device to help Katy's Antioch Missionary Baptist Church conduct an underground survey of its historic cemetery at FM 1463 and Stockdick Road. His work laid to rest concerns about unmarked graves.

When he's not tromping around cemeteries, Gochioco, 54, is traveling the world, helping business and government clients from Appalachia to Asia. In his Cinco Ranch home office, there are pictures of Gochioco in hard hat and goggles, surveying a low-ceilinged coal mine shaft in Ohio.

"I'm what you call a geophysicist: an earth scientist," said Gochioco. "You do a Google search of coal geophysics and my name, my papers come up. I'm at the top of the heap, so to speak."

Originally from the Philippines, Gochioco holds a master's degree in physics from Ohio University and worked in the oil, gas and mining industries for many years. He started his own consulting business in 2004.

"My specialty is diverse geophysics technology to detect and image geologic and man-made anomalies and mineral deposits," he said.

SUZANNE REHAK: FOR THE CHRONICLE

ON A MISSION: Katy geophysicist Lawrence Gochioco conducted underground surveys at the Antioch Missionary Baptist Church cemetery in Katy.

LAWRENCE GOCHIOCO

- **Resident:** Katy area
- **Occupation:** Geophysicist
- **Feature:** He helped locate graves at the Antioch Missionary Baptist Church cemetery.
- **Background:** Originally from the Philippines, he travels worldwide for business and government clients

His work with Antioch and the Katy Heritage Society when the church sought help in documenting burials in its 81-year-old historic cemetery.

According to Katy historians, early Katy resident Adam Stockdick sold cemetery land to Antioch in 1929 for $37.50. The church itself, known then as Colored Baptist Church, sits on land at 655 Danover that Stockdick donated in 1915.

Rita Williams, a longtime Katy resident, serves on a church committee developing burial policies for the old cemetery.

"We were trying to figure out who is buried there and how many graves are there," Williams said. "We wanted to put names where we could determine there was a grave, and find out what plots are still available."

The problem was, the church had few records, and memories of older church and family members were often contradictory.

"We went to people who had been around for a long time and asked them who was buried there," she said. "Some people they said were buried there, it turns out they were buried somewhere else."

The Katy Heritage Society, which is helping the church preserve, document and gain state historic recognition for the burial ground, began a public campaign to cover the cost of radar imaging.

Gochioco, who heard about the project during a Katy Rotary Club presentation by society Executive Director Carol Adams, told her he had something better.

It's called a digital multi-frequency source electromagnetic system. It looks like a snow ski on a shoulder strap, with a device the size of a tissue box mounted on top. It has a sounding depth of about 40-50 feet, and transmits electromagnet waves like radar.

"I can't find Jimmy Hoffa, but it can detect abandoned oil and gas wells, sinkholes, sewer lines, anything that's buried in the ground," Gochioco said with a laugh.

For several days, he walked the one-acre cemetery, producing data and graphics that showed where graves are located, and where they likely are not. Spikes in the graphics indicate metal in coffins or vaults, and show a cluster of graves on the east side of the cemetery, and a few more scattered on the west side.

"What he did was extremely helpful to us," said Adams. "What he didn't find is as important as what he did find."

Today, the cemetery is freshly mowed behind a wrought iron fence. New temporary grave markers, as well as older gravestones and memorials, mark the graves of some of Katy's early residents.

Gochioco was happy to volunteer for a good cause. "I saw this as an opportunity to demonstrate the flexibility of this technology and help the community as well."

He said digital multi-frequency source electromagnetic technology was first used in Iraq, as a rapidly deployable method to detect buried nuclear weapons.

6/13/10