



Award Winners

Municipal Operator

– Rob Oom, City of Sabetha

The Kansas Rural Water Association has named Rob Oom, operator for the city of Sabetha Water Plant, “Municipal Operator of the Year”.

Rob has worked for the City of Sabetha for more than ten years.

Over that time-span, many upgrades have been made to the city’s water treatment facility. He presently holds a Class IV Operator Certification, which is the second highest level of certification attainable through the Kansas Department of Health and Environment.

Rob Oom had the initiative and desire to learn why it is appropriate to add the various chemicals and how to calculate dosages correctly; his desire to find out why and how to change the chemicals has not only saved the city a lot of money, but has also resulted in improved water quality.

The Sabetha treatment plant has been updated with automated controls of the chemical feeding systems, and is also now equipped with automated turbidity readings that record every fifteen minutes. All these changes now allow the plant to operate on an automatic setting which had never before been possible. Well-liked by other city employees, Rob is especially popular for all his one-liner jokes and his quick wit. He has some especially humorous stories to tell about the time when he was a cab driver in Las Vegas.

Sabetha City Administrator Doug Allen commented recently in The Sabetha Herald. “Rob has been instrumental in bringing automation to our water and wastewater facilities. His foresight has put Sabetha Municipal Utilities at the lead statewide in technology. Receiving the ‘Operator of the Year Award’ is a very prestige’s award in the utility world and a very deserving one for Rob.”

“Being a water plant operator can be a very stressful job, if things are not going well. For example, turbidity, CL₂, TTHM’s – but once you get onto things, like chemical dosages, etc., you start having a lot more free time, so you can go out and catch stray dogs!”

– Rob Oom



Special Recognition Award

– John Armstrong, City of Syracuse

The Kansas Rural Water Association recognized John Armstrong, Syracuse City Administrator, for his years of work in public service. The Association presented a “Special Recognition” award to him at the 2011 conference; he has served his community for just less than forty years.

As a young man, John returned to Syracuse to begin work for the city. He began by working the trash route, manually dumping fifty-gallon barrels into the truck. Within a few years, he was appointed City Superintendent. John has been instrumental in seeing through the construction of a large elevated water storage tank, sewer line extensions and construction of a lagoon system for the city’s wastewater utility. In the mid-80’s, the city implemented an automated solid waste collection system for municipal and area rural residents alike. John worked to obtain easements for the installation of new water transmission mains. In 2001, he was promoted to the position of city administrator. Along with his many titles have come multiple responsibilities. The resurfacing of the streets is a major project every summer. Regardless of the task, John has always taken his position as an employee for the city very seriously. He has always been one of the first to be in the trench to help repair a water leak, is there to help pour concrete, or help out a neighboring community, the city of Coolidge, on his own time.

John has served the community as an accomplished operator, administrator, and individual. Others say that his positive attitude, amazing work ethic, talent, intelligence, and skill have made him almost irreplaceable.

John also was very instrumental in the procurement and development of the Syracuse Sand Dunes Park, south of Syracuse. He is active with the community Youth Activities Board, the Sand Park Board, and has served on the local fire department for twenty years.

“I like serving the public and I have always considered myself a people person. I like the challenges that municipal work presents; therefore I feel I have a fantastic job.”

– John Armstrong



Municipal Manager

– **Bill Callaway, Clay Center
Public Utilities Commission**

Bill Callaway, Superintendent of Clay Center Public Utilities Commission, was named Municipal Manager of the Year by the Kansas Rural Water Association. Clay Center Public Utilities Commission (PUC) is independent of the city of Clay Center. It was organized in 1903 and supplies water, electric, to Clay Center and the surrounding area.

Born and raised in southwestern Kansas, Bill spent his younger years working for a local electrician and observing his father who worked for the city of Pratt for many years. After graduation from high school, Bill began a career in the electrical industry, installing electrical generation and high voltage switchgear. He later accepted a position at Clay Center Public Utilities Commission as a maintenance electrician, working his way up to power plant superintendent and then, superintendent of utilities.

Bill is a primary reason the PUC recently constructed a new reverse osmosis water treatment plant. He saw a need to not only soften the city's water but to also construct a plant that would address future potential contaminants.

Bill is a strong advocate of municipal public power. His willingness to always be of assistance and help anyone in need has brought distinction to himself and Clay Center Public Utilities Commission as he has assisted communities during disasters. He is presently serving as President of



Kansas Municipal Utilities and is a member of the executive board and past President of Kansas Power Pool. Bill has distinguished himself with extraordinary service, assisting many communities during disasters. For example, Bill spent many days helping and assisting the city of Greensburg after the tornado. KRWA staff learned how to deal with FEMA by watching Bill at work in Greensburg. The story goes that after a few exchanges of ideas, FEMA soon came to the conclusion that utilities understood what they were doing and they went back to the command center – and Bill and others continued with the restoration of power and other services

Bill has worked for the Clay Center Public Utilities Commission for thirty-five years. Over that span of time, Bill has seen many changes. Bill suggests that the most important change has been the improvement in equipment and safety policies.

“My career has been very rewarding. I have had everlasting memories of my coworkers and customers. Being able to serve the Public and bring a needed service (electric and water) to the community has been my way of life. One of the most rewarding opportunities of my career has been my participation in KMU / KMAP (Mutual Aid Program). Having the ability to respond to a major disaster and render my experience helping unfortunate individuals has been personally rewarding. If I had one thing to say about my career it would be that my employees have contributed to my success. Without those dedicated employees I could never have accomplished these things alone.”

– Bill Callaway

Rural Water Office Manager

– **Shirley Hoch, Morris RWD 1**

Shirley Hoch, Office Manager for Rural Water District No. 1 of Morris County, has been named “Rural Water Office Manager of the Year” by the Kansas Rural Water Association.

Shirley and her husband Willis were part of the steering committee in forming a rural water district in the early 1980s because of very poor water quality and quantity issues in the area south of Junction City. For several years, many meetings were held in homes of board members to work at obtaining funding for a rural water district project that finally started construction in 1993. That system, a \$6 million project, has now expanded to include nearly 700 patrons served through nearly 375 miles of pipeline and has users located in four counties.



While many water districts stop with one project, that's not the case with Morris RWD 1. Shirley, working with the manager and board, has continued to work to add new customers, obtaining additional financing to expand the project to serve more people at reasonable rates.

Shirley has been the only office person that the district has had since it went into service in 1994. When Shirley is not busy with the rural water district she enjoys spending time with her family.

Shirley says that what she likes most about her job is “THE PEOPLE!”

“I have the pleasure of knowing many people, whether they are our members or those the district does business with. Communications with our members is the most important thing that our office does. I started with the water district in 1992 doing land easements and I continue to learn as the business of the water district continues to grow and change.”

– Shirley Hoch

Wastewater Operator

– Mike Wagner,
City of McPherson

Mike Wagner, Wastewater Plant Superintendent at McPherson, was named Municipal Wastewater Operator of the Year Award from the Kansas Rural Water Association.



Mike is a native of the McPherson area. After graduating from high school, he went into the home building business. Until 1990, Mike continued building houses but then took advantage of an opportunity to join the McPherson wastewater treatment plant staff as an entry-level operator. From those early days, he saw the plant go through the first of three major upgrades. The first was a \$4.5 million project that resulted in a complete process change; then in 2000 a \$1.5 million project included effluent disinfection. A recently completed project was a \$12 million upgrade that included new headworks and solids handling. He was promoted into the position of Superintendent in 2008. Throughout the years, he has also continued to serve as system's administrator for the computer that controls not only plant operations but also process monitoring. In 2005, Mike was the recipient of the William D. Hatfield award from the Kansas Water Environment Association for outstanding performance and professionalism in the operation of a wastewater treatment plant. He presently supervises three plant operators and two collection system staff.

Mike says that what he likes most about working at McPherson is that he works with a group of dedicated people who take pride in what they do and where they live.

“That has been a large factor in my personal satisfaction working for the City of McPherson. The staff at the WWTF takes a great deal of pride in their work and knows the responsibilities to public health are very important. Support from City Hall is vital as well. McPherson has always been a city that strives to keep on the leading edge of technology and environmental concern while balancing it with common sense attitudes and fiscal responsibility. I feel very fortunate to have local government representatives that are receptive to ideas and concerns from the field. They listen.”

“On a personal note, one recent highlight involved the recent facility upgrade. For the last 20 years the SBR process in McPherson has resulted in excellent effluent quality but has been less than ideal when it came to solids handling. The upgrade of new digestion facilities and centrifuge dewatering has been long in coming. My involvement in changing the manual wasting process to one that is fully automated was something I have looked forward to for a long time. By working closely with the computer programmer, we were able to create algorithms that accurately maintain process solids using a true mass balance “operators” approach. We measure, calculate, and transfer solids based on real pound numbers, not just time or volume. We are able to maintain MCRT, FM, and MLSS control much tighter than manual control ever allowed.”

“Good people. Opportunity for growth. Responsibility. There isn't just one thing about my job I like. It's the big picture,”

– Mike Wagner

City Clerk

– Anita Goertzen, City of Goessel

Anita Goertzen, Goessel City Clerk, was recently named “City Clerk of the Year” by the Kansas Rural Water Association.

Anita Goertzen began employment with the city of Goessel nearly twenty years ago. After

working as the utility billing clerk for five years, she was named city clerk and she has been in that position ever since. As city clerk, Anita is responsible for monthly billings, monthly and yearly reports, and preparing budgets as well as being the city's “go-to person” for about anything city residents might want. She has a real dedication for her job and the city. Anita is always helpful to the public when they come in or when they call and assists the public works director during emergencies.

Anita holds membership in the City Clerks and Municipal Finance Officers Association of Kansas and has

participated in the professional development training through the Kansas/International Institute of Municipal Clerks. She became a Certified Municipal Clerk and two years later, she became a member of the “Master Municipal Clerk Academy”. In addition to her routine duties, she is active in promoting both the city and county and has been recognized by each for her leadership abilities. She was active in forming a foundation to raise funds to help local non-profit groups within the city. She actively promotes the city with newspaper articles and as the administrator of the city's Facebook page. For about the last thirty years, she along with family members, perform locally singing old-time gospel songs, bluegrass style, as well as performing at Kansas Sampler Festivals throughout the state.

“The thing I like most about my job is the variety of tasks that being a city clerk entails. It's never boring. I also enjoy getting to interact with the residents of Goessel. I appreciate the support I get from the mayor, fellow coworkers and the community.”

– Anita Goertzen



Friend of Rural Water Award

– **David Waldo**
KS Dept. of Health and Environment



David F. Waldo, Chief of the Public Water Supply Section at the Kansas Department of Health and Environment (KDHE), Topeka, was recognized by the Kansas Rural Water Association for his work in support of local community water and wastewater systems. The Association presented its “Friend of Rural Water Award” to David during ceremonies held at the organization’s 44th annual conference and exhibition.

David Waldo has been the lead person, and a constant in implementing wastewater and drinking water programs in Kansas. Cities, rural water districts, public wholesale systems and non-community systems have all been impacted by ongoing efforts by Waldo and others at KDHE to help systems make improvements and comply with the various regulations of the Safe Drinking Water Act. The Association board of directors and staff wanted to also recognize David particularly for his work to help smaller municipal systems and rural water districts access the Kansas Public Water Supply Loan Program.

David has degrees in Civil and Environmental Engineering from Kansas State University and is a licensed professional engineer in Kansas. From 1973 to May 1975, he worked as an instructor in engineering classes at K-State; from June 1975 to October 1983, he was Chief of the Permits, and Enforcement Unit at the Bureau of Water Quality at KDHE. In that capacity he was responsible for state administration of the federal Clean Water Act NPDES wastewater permit program. He also served as project engineer for Wichita and Kansas City municipal wastewater projects to assure design and construction were in accordance with federal and state requirements. In 1996, David was involved in the development of the Kansas Public Water Supply Loan Program and has subsequently been heavily involved in the administration of that program.

“What I like most about my work: I really enjoy getting out of the office and visiting with water supply people. If you spend too much time in the office, it’s easy to think of what we do at KDHE as impacting water systems, but the impacts are really on the operators and managers of the systems along with their customers. We have more in common than not, whether it’s raising our children, paying the bills, worrying about aging parents, or making sure the water is safe to drink.”

– David Waldo

Rural Water Manager

– **Mike Fulkerson**
Leavenworth Cons. RWD 1



Mike Fulkerson, Leavenworth Consolidated RWD 1, was named Rural Water Manager of the Year by the Kansas Rural Water Association. Leavenworth Cons. RWD 1 serves nearly 2,000 customers in eastern

Leavenworth County, generally abutting the western and northern borders of Wyandotte County/Kansas City, Kansas just 5 minutes west of the Kansas Speedway, and also provides individual metered services in the City of Basehor and City of Lansing.

Mike began working for the district in 2000. He started with the district as a maintenance worker; his present official title is Operations Manager. He holds a Class II operator certification and is working towards higher certification. The system purchases water from two separate water suppliers (Kansas City, Kansas Board of Public Utilities and Leavenworth Waterworks). Mike is conscientious in his interaction with the Board of Directors, with fellow employees, and district customers. His professionalism and attention to the overall well-being of the district make him a

pleasure for others to work with. He brings leadership and organization to the job.

Mike balances his water district job with his other job as a Fireman at Lawrence. Mike is an avid photographer – so long as the photos don’t involve him. According to employees, any pictures of him suddenly disappear no matter where they hide them! Mike also maintains a good rapport among his employees until college football or basketball season, when the KU Jayhawks rule! He is always looking to the future and any needed improvements to the water district. The district is in the construction phase of a new one million gallon tower that will provide additional supply for the district.

“I enjoy working with fellow staff and community members to ensure our community’s water needs are met, not only today, but future needs as well. All of us in the industry today are just stewards of our kids and grandkids water systems. Decisions made today will affect future generations fifty and maybe, even one hundred years from now. It is often difficult to maintain and build a water system that will be able to serve the needs of our community today and well into the future, all while keeping an eye on economy of scale for our customers. These types of challenges are what drives me to go to work each day.”

– Mike Fulkerson

Rural Water Operator

– Bruce Spare
Saline RWDs 3, 7, 8

Bruce Spare, operator for three rural water districts based in Saline County, was named “Rural Water Operator of the Year” by the Kansas Rural Water Association.

Bruce is the operator for Saline RWD 8 and more recently, contracted to provide operations and maintenance services for Saline RWD 7 and also to Saline RWD 3. None of the systems are large; the three districts serve a total of just over 600 customers.

There are few operators in Kansas who have had more challenges with water treatment because of poor source water quality than Bruce Spare has. For many years, there were ongoing struggles to try to provide usable water; it was so bad that customers in some cases simply reduced their use or disconnected from the system. The problem was not that there was any shortcoming by the operator; it was because the plant serving the old Saline RWD 5 in the Assaria area was never designed to treat water having high iron and manganese content. Eventually, with refinancing through USDA Rural Development, much better ground water was located and new wells were installed. The original district was reorganized as Saline RWD 8. The change has allowed Bruce to focus on customer service. He enjoys working with patrons and others and he takes great pride in providing the best quality water possible. More recent operations that Bruce has assumed are for Saline RWD 3, which purchases water from the City of Salina and Saline RWD 7 that purchases water from Ellsworth RWD 1. He enjoys working with those district’s boards and bookkeepers very much.

Bruce and his wife Cheryl, who is bookkeeper for the RWD 8, live on a farm southeast of Assaria; they also have a cattle operation. In his spare time, Bruce operates a sawmill, which he built to “just have fun with” and he now does custom wood sawing. And for more relaxing fun, he sings with the Smoky Valley Men’s Chorus in Lindsborg. He enjoys helping the local 4-Her’s learn to weld as the project leader. As a member of the Evangelical Covenant Church at Lindsborg, he participates in the church choir and men’s ministry.

Bruce says that the most important thing to him and what he likes about his job is to provide good water quality to meet patrons’ needs.

“I value working in a cooperative way with patrons, board members, contractors and government agencies to ensure the quality supply of water,”

– Bruce Spare



Shown in the photo are KRWA Board President Sam Atherton, Deborah Corr with USDA Rural Development and KRWA staff member Rita Clary.

USDA Rural Development recognizes KRWA for service to Kansas

USDA Rural Development extended a recognition award to the Kansas Rural Water Association at the 2011 conference. Presented by Deborah Corr, Acting Director of Community and Business Programs, the award cited KRWA’s service to the citizens of the state of Kansas and in particular for the work by KRWA staff member Rita Clary with applicants and recipients of the USDA Recovery Act Funding. The citation on the award reads as follows:

In recognition of your commitment and dedication to the vital partnership between KRWA and USDA Rural Development in the joint service of rural Kansans,

and,

In special acknowledgment of the significant assistance and expertise provided by KRWA to the applicants and recipients of USDA 2009-2010 Recovery Act Funding.

We are honored to partner with KRWA in advancing the future of Kansas’ rural communities.

**Mark your calendars for
March 27-29, 2012**

**45th Annual Conference & Exhibition
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City of Emporia Water Judged “Best Tasting Water in Kansas”

Water from the City of Emporia public water supply system was judged the “Best Tasting Water In Kansas” during the KRWA annual conference.

Emporia’s entry was judged first place over other finalists: city of Parsons; city of El Dorado; and, Public Wholesale Water District No. 4 at Big Hill Reservoir near Cherryvale.

Emporia is a repeat winner, having now taken first place in Kansas in five out of the total of eleven contests held since 2001 at the annual conference. Water from Emporia will be entered in the Great American Taste Test early in 2012 in Washington, D.C. in the annual contest sponsored by the National Rural Water Association.

Emporia was the first water supplier in Kansas to install ozonation as a water treatment process. Ozonation produces exceptionally good tasting water while also reducing the regulated disinfection byproducts to very low levels. The high quality water is greatly appreciated by both Emporia city customers and customers in other cities and RWDs that



Phil Cooper, Emporia Plant Superintendent, accepts “Best Tasting Water in Kansas” trophy from Pat McCool, KRWA consultant, on May 4th, 2011.

purchase water from Emporia. The water treatment plant staff should be commended on the fine, high quality water they provide to these customers.

A trophy was presented to the city commission and plant superintendent Phil Cooper on May 4 by Pat McCool, KRWA Consultant. Emporia has been a long-time, supporting member of the Kansas Rural Water Association. Congratulations to the city of Emporia!

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