



The Art and Science of Wastewater Utility Management

I like old things—in particular, antiques and collectibles that have weathered the years and stood the test of time. It is quite amazing when you find old pottery from the late 1800s with no chips, no cracks, and in pristine condition. There is little maintenance involved in the upkeep of most antiques, other than polishing and safeguarding them.

Much of the unseen water and wastewater infrastructure in the United States falls under the category of antique, with some pipes dating back 100 years.

In most cases the infrastructure has stood the test of time and has served a useful purpose; but mechanical things break down, and new technologies are continually being developed that improve equipment, materials, and processes. Upgrading systems is critical to efficiency; however, that costs money. The question is raised: do elected officials understand that these utilities need continual maintenance and upgrades? It is clear that some do, and it is also evident that some don't. It is our responsibility to make sure they all understand.

I recently spoke at the New York Conference of Mayors (NYCOM) Public Works Training School in Alexandria Bay. I was right at home with the many municipal employees and elected officials in attendance. In my presentation, I covered the benefits of New York Water Environment Association membership and noted the services provided by the organization. During part of my presentation, I discussed the responsibilities associated with utility operations and our need to rethink how we look at things (for example, thinking of underground infrastructure as an asset to your community—a big one—and maintaining it in the same way you would a building).

Some of the other topics covered in the NYCOM program appeared similar to what you might find at a NYWEA event, including aging infrastructure, safety and security compliance requirements, and even a session on rubber sidewalks used from recycled tire rubber. The common component of these types of meetings is information exchange, which gives the attendees better tools to do their jobs.

It is our hope that this issue of *Clearwaters* will also be a tool for you to do your job better, as this issue looks at the complexities involved in utility management. Whether you are performing critical repairs to an old system or making adjustments to a new system, whether you are a consultant, an operator of a small or large utility, or an academician, effective communication builds a strong foundation. Those who place a high importance on effective communication will reap the rewards. This is the *art and science beyond physical utility management*. It is not just efficient utility management; it is also proactive communication to all of the major players, including elected officials.

In Amy Santos's article on page 44, you will learn about the wastewater panels coordinated by the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (NYSDEC), Syracuse University's Environmental Finance Center, NYWEA, and the Rural Water

Association that have been taking place over the past two years. As a follow-up to these panels, NYSDEC is developing a wastewater handbook that will cover the key issues associated with utility management, including an introduction to wastewater management, sustainable financing and funding options, regulatory overview, legal responsibilities, public relations, and case studies. The wastewater handbooks are in the process of being written now, and should be available on the NYSDEC website in the spring. We'll be sure to let you know when they are available.

I would like to point out that the NYWEA headquarters has a new address: we've moved into a refurbished millwork building in the Franklin Square area of Syracuse. The phone number remains the same, and the new office address appears on page 3.

Note: Editorial Change in Leadership

This will be the last issue of *Clearwaters* that will be edited by Hope Dodge. Hope took on the position of editor when her children were younger. Since then, she has taken a full-time job with Ithaca College and has found it challenging to maintain both positions. I would like to express my appreciation to Hope Dodge for her leadership and support in the production of *Clearwaters* magazine. Thank you, Hope, for your many contributions! Lois Hickey will take over as editor, commencing with the spring issue. Lois is familiar to the association and has been working for several years as our public relations representative. You can reach Lois at Clearwaters@nywea.org. Welcome aboard, Lois!



Economic Development and Environmental
Responsibility Go Hand in Hand



Upcoming Meetings

78th Annual Meeting

February 5–8, 2006, New York City

22nd Legislative Forum

May 9, 2006, Albany, New York

Joint NYWEA/NEWEA 2006 Spring Technical Conference and Exhibition

June 4–7, 2006, Mystic, Connecticut