

## Being A Good Neighbor

By Morris Coolidge & Jamie Herman  
NYRWA State Circuit Riders

In today's cost saving world, most professionals, including water operators, are faced with providing the same high level of service with less personnel. As we all know, many innovations have led to the decrease in manpower, but to properly operate and maintain a water system, adequate staffing is still crucial.

Unfortunately, most water systems are either financially unable, or politically unwilling to employ enough qualified operators to provide for the necessary care a water system requires. We as operators, have two choices in this case, either face this situation negatively and only do "what we can", or reach out for other positive solutions which could benefit our systems. If you are willing to try the latter, you may be pleasantly surprised.

Most of us learn a great deal from our predecessors, training sessions and working experience. We also understand that it is impossible to be "the best" at every aspect of operating a water system. That is why it is imperative that we drop our egos at the door, and ask for help once in a while. If you are having a difficult time with a problem within your system, maybe your neighboring operator could help. As always, we here at NYRWA are ready and willing to assist in any way we can. However, we may not have any field staff in your immediate area, so relying on your neighbor for assistance may be your best immediate action.

The technical assistance we provide takes us to every corner of the state, and many places in between. We assist a wide variety of systems, ranging from municipal systems serving up to 10,000 customers, to the smallest of privately owned systems serving only a hand full of people.

Sharing labor and equipment between municipalities is not a new concept. Many water systems however, have a very hard time grasping the subject. This article is not intended to get involved in any of the legal or political issues which hinder our efforts, but rather to encourage you, as a system operator, to reach out to neighboring operators and elected officials to see if such a relationship could benefit your water system or that of your neighbor. In our industry it is vital to know and communicate with other operators who may have certain education, expertise or real world experience from which you can learn. You may very well be that reference for someone else. Not only could such an alliance benefit your system with labor and knowledge, but, you may discover that your neighbors are using the same materials or supplies that you are. There may be some increased cost savings by purchasing chemicals, repair parts, etc... together.

Recently, we assisted a small privately owned water system, which needed to make substantial investments in their infrastructure over the past year. This system had a

series of "pinhole" leaks on a 150' section of 2" water main. With all of the previous upgrades, the owners found themselves a little short on capital. They were able to hire a contractor to excavate, but lacked the funds to purchase the pipe and fittings needed to complete the repairs.

Once again, we found out how generous water operators, and the systems they work for, can be. We only needed to place two phone calls to systems we had previously assisted, and they generously, and without hesitation, donated the necessary materials. (Thank you Ron Trzepacz and Rich VanDyne). Within a week, the pipe was replaced and the system integrity was restored. Without these "good neighbors", its impossible to say how long this situation may have continued.

One area of the state where we encountered an unparalleled cooperation between municipal water systems is in Chautauqua County. The water system operators from Cherry Creek, Cassadaga, Forestville, Brocton, Mayville and Sinclairville assist each other anytime, day or night, 24/7/365, no questions asked. These are all small systems with one or two employees, who could not survive without their high level of concern and preparedness for their neighbors.

There are several other examples throughout the State, some of which include the operators from Scio and Belmont in Allegany County and the operators from Jay, Keene, Wilmington and Lake Placid in Essex County. Of course, the list could go on and on.

For those of you who are not a part of such a mutual aid program, and you know who you are, please try to get more involved. Perhaps your system does not require any assistance, that doesn't mean that your neighbor could not use your assistance. Make yourselves more available for one another, and we're sure the entire water industry will benefit. If you or any of your elected officials have any questions concerning how other systems initiated or maintain such a program, please feel free to contact us at 1-888-697-8725, and we will put you in contact with the personnel who have made it prosper. 💧

