

The Next Generation of Operators

by Pat Scalera,
CEO



As I sit to write this article, I am deep in thought about a session I attended at the National Rural Water Association Convention in Reno, Nevada. The speaker was Dr. Kearns from the University of Central Oklahoma talking about managing the new generation. Dr. Kearns discussed applying successful management in today's modern business environment characterized by rapidly evolving technologies, a highly competitive market place, expanding regulatory constraints and increasing capable staff with diverse expectations.

As I sat and listened, I looked around the room and noticed the varied age groups of these dedicated water and wastewater professionals. Some present were just getting started in our field of work, but the majority were close to the retirement age. The interactive discussion was very interesting, and well worth my time, to attend this class. It certainly got me thinking about what we all need to do to inspire, motivate, and reach out to our youth to consider a career in the water and wastewater industry.

I know we have talked about this growing concern to attract new operators to replace the current workforce as it retires. This is not just a local issue, it is a nationwide issue.

We have developed a DVD to help educate our elected officials on the importance of this profession, and have developed a career brochure to generate interest, but it is time to take it to the next level.

What can you do to help generate interest in this field of work? Consider attending a career day at your local school – contact the guidance office to see when an opportunity exists that you could participate in. We will be happy to send you copies of the brochure to distribute among the students. Also invite students and their parents to tour your facility and hear about a career in our industry. The children of today are interested in the environment, new technologies, and diverse tasks. Now is the time to arouse their interests. You never know, during these rough times, it might prove that one or more of these parents may have been recently laid off and considering a career change.

As I was going through all the mail that accumulated on my desk while I was away, I came across the Hoosier Pipeline, a publication for the Alliance of

Indiana Rural Water, and found an interesting article on promoting our industry to the younger generation by inviting a Cub Scout Pack to their conference. The scouts toured the exhibit hall and learned about the water business as part of the reduce, recycle and reuse theme for the month. The scouts asked questions of experienced operators, engineers, equipment sales reps and other water professionals. The cubs were able to get their hands on some of the equipment, learn how it works and how it brings safe drinking water to the faucets in their homes. What a great idea!! You might consider this in your hometown tour.

We all need to do our part to raise awareness and the Alliance of Indiana Rural Water has shared their experience with all of us and we appreciate it. It's your turn now, get involved, act now. 💧