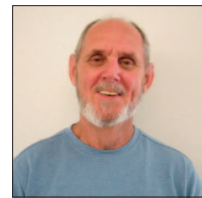


An Option Less Taken



by Jim Bower,
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On a recent visit to the Village of Clifton Springs Wastewater Treatment Facility, I met and visited with a recently hired operator trainee and a fine young gentleman by the name of Erik Merkley. The reason I find this information newsworthy is because far too few communities use the completely viable option of filling a vacated operator position with an operator trainee. It seems that most communities opt for an fully-certified operator to forgo the time and expense of the training necessary to certify a trainee. I commend Chief Operator Doug Fagner and the village officials responsible for making this commitment.

I doubt that anyone would argue that the number of certified operators in the state is dwindling and there are few, if any, certified operators that aren't working if they still have a desire to. So when a community opts to hire a certified operator, it generally means they are luring the operator away from another community, which obviously leaves the second community with the task of filling an operator position, and the cycle continues. From the viewpoint of communities, it would be grand if there were a large pool of certified operators looking for work, but unfortunately the opposite is true.

I personally believe the Trainee Program should be expanded throughout the water and wastewater professions in the state. I would love to see schools initiate an internship

program wherein students can work in these fields and see if they themselves have the environmental commitment necessary to pursue a career in either the water or wastewater treatment field. I'm afraid that, if the current trend continues of operators retiring without new recruits in the field to replace them, then the gap between positions to be filled and certified people to fill them will reach a critical point where facilities just won't have qualified people to operate them.

So I encourage any community facing the unenviable task of replacing any of their operating staff to look at the option of hiring a trainee. If at all possible, hire the trainee prior to the retirement of the experienced operator, to facilitate a seamless transfer of knowledge and experience and to ensure the continuing efficiency of the plant. It is a horrific waste to lose many years of experience through retirement and not have any of that knowledge transferred to the newcomer whose responsibility it will be to do that job.

While I'm generally on the subject of operator certification, I'd like to congratulate Andrew and Dean at the Westfield Wastewater Facility for successfully completing their basic operations courses. I look forward to the day when they join the ranks of certified wastewater operators. I'm always ready to welcome enthusiastic individuals into a field I've enjoyed pursuing for over forty years. ●