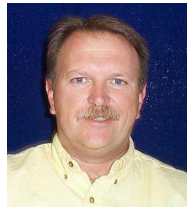


“The Times They Are a Changing...”

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A lot has been written, mulled over, debated, discussed over the last few years about the pending retirements of our baby-boomer workforce in the water and wastewater industry. Most of these comments and discussions had to do with the fact that many communities would have a difficult time replacing the men and women who filled these positions for many years. Numerous villages and towns lacked the foresight to adequately hire and train replacements to fill these vacancies. There were several who felt that the generation following the baby-boomers might not be up to the task. From my vantage point, there seems to have been a lot of negativity surrounding this subject.

Well, I'm here to tell you that the world has not come to an end, the sky is not falling, and the taps are still running! What was once perceived as a crisis in our chosen profession has not materialized as of this writing. What I am seeing in the field is a younger generation who has picked up the ball, and by all accounts, is running in the right direction! These new operators may or may not know everything, but for the most part I have found that they are willing to learn. The purpose of this article is not to bash the old guard, because their time has already come and gone. No, the purpose of this article is to acknowledge these newer, younger water and wastewater operators. I have been very pleasantly surprised to find that many of these guys and gals are open-minded and bring a great deal of energy to succeed with them. They are finding the barriers placed before them by their predecessors crumbling like the Berlin Wall. I have to admit that I have worked with numerous old-timers over the years that you might call set in their ways or unwavering in their methods. Although, they are dedicated hard workers for their communities and have served their people well, it is actually kind of refreshing to work with younger people that express an interest in the work and are open to improvements and new technologies.

While the crisis is not yet over, there is hope, and the chance that some of us older guys can still pass along some ideas and techniques that we have been fortunate enough to learn along the way. Working with so many new people has also renewed my interest in the work at hand. I find myself working with communities that in the past did not ask for or express interest in receiving assistance from our organization. There also seems to be a change of the old guard in the decision-making arena, with more and more qualified people stepping into village and town government roles. These changes serve to facilitate improvements to infrastructure that were once deemed financially impossible. It is funny how sometimes these changes seem to materialize out of nowhere. Like the song says, “And the times they are a changing”, and so are we. ●