

“NETWORKING” can have positive results

Many of my articles deal with training, education and their benefits. Now, I have proof positive with dollars saved (\$ - \$ - \$). It's amazing how that little dollar sign will get your attention. Bottom line savings. What else do you need to know?

Let's back up a bit to the NYRWA conference in Buffalo this past May. Why do we urge you to attend? That's because there is training, seeing new products and trends, talking with the vendors, and my favorite is networking with fellow operators. (In the old days we called it chewin' the fat) Must start using the modern terminology so it sounds like I'm cool. Anyway, networking with someone who has the same problems, a shoulder to lean on. Share the grief. Discuss problems and more times than not, a solution or advice is passed on that will lead to the solution of a problem. In this particular situation, a couple of rather innocent questions started the ball rolling. Let me give you some background to this story.

The wastewater staff of NYRWA arranged a field trip to a large treatment facility near the conference center. It was to demonstrate that even though it is a multi-million gallon per day facility, the problems and solutions are the same as the smallest treatment plants. Their pumps, motors, and tanks are bigger, but still a pump has one function regardless of size. Move a liquid from point A to point B. The lab and its equipment may be more complex, however, the same daily tests are performed just like the smaller facilities do. Temperatures, pH, settleables done the same. The larger facility does more of it. The bugs are the same, it is still lumpy water.

Those of you who went on the tour had an opportunity to see how the big guys get through their day. Just like in a small plant, some days are better than others. We boarded the bus and followed the highway to the Town of Amherst WWTP. (A big Thank You to Wendy, Ken, Bob, Dan, Dave, Terry, Joe and Larry for a presentation on sludge pellets as a disposal method and the tour of your facility. A job well done and much appreciated by NYRWA.) The operators did a great job of showing us their facility and discussing their problems and how they dealt with them. One of the advantages they have is more staff. A small facility has a staff of one or two, so you can see the problem with trying to have a group discussion. Some who went on the tour remarked that they were surprised to learn that the big guys have the same problems, face the same difficulties in a day, just more of it. Still lumpy water. Working with the same bugs, making the adjustments so the process runs smoothly and the best treatment is achieved. That is the goal regardless of the facility size to get the best treatment of the wastewater and return it for reuse.

As we walked around the facility one of the operators on the tour started asking our guide about sludge blanket depths in the primary clarifiers. He asked other questions about solids handling and started thinking of how could this information relate to my small plant. Think about it, break it down to fit, give it some thought. He returned home from the conference with some ideas and willing to try some changes that might make things better. He took into consideration the differences in the sizes of the tanks and the volume of flows, but if you scale it down and proceed with caution, maybe some good will come from it. Measure this, change that, and give it some time. Some adjustments given time sometimes can have real benefits.

I am trying not to get too technical with this story because I don't want you to lose focus of the end results. Making a long and boring technical article shorter, let's say da – da – and da and the bottom line is money saved. Got your attention yet.

If you really want the technical stuff and those of us who get excited by lumpy water, you can call Kirk Noetzel at the Village of Oxford WWTP. He is the one who took a question and formed an idea, then put it into practice and made it happen. He deserves the credit for showing results from some thought, planning, applying and getting a better than expected result. To sum up briefly what Kirk did was to adjust pumping rates and blanket depth of the primary clarifier. The result was a better quality sludge coming from the aerobic digester. Better quality you ask, well first off less offensive odor, that has benefits for the neighborhood, and second and most important, the sludge was better processed through the belt filter press, the money saving part comes in here. The press did not have to be operated as often so less trips to the landfill, less tipping fees, less mechanical wear and tear on the equipment and the big one is less electricity consumed. If you notice the key word here is "less". In our business less is best.

Kirk can and will happily supply the nitty-gritty but he guestimated approximate savings of about six hundred dollars a month so far. Do the math, twelve months which leads to years and so on. Real dollars saved. When what you do affects the bottom line in a positive way, well some praise is in order. When dollars saved is achieved, it is worth the time and effort invested.

When I was in Oxford to visit with Kirk, he was telling me about his success and with pride in his voice and a smile on his face, and I quote "I sometimes wondered about the value of attending the NYRWA conference. Well now I know and will try to make every one from now on. I learned the value of networking".

New York Rural Water just got the two operators together, they did the talking, and Kirk brought home an idea, thought it out, put it into practice and got the results. Job well done.

The next time you see a couple of operators talking, it may actually be about operations and it could very well be to your benefit to slide over and listen. You never know the value of it. To me the exchange of ideas is the best form of training. It doesn't have to be formal, just "chewin' the fat" can lead to benefits and a better bottom line.

Nuff said. See ya: Mike