

THE FUTURE UP-AND-COMING

By Jonathon Barnes

As a once not-so-young man, I was introduced to the world of public works. When I entered this industry, I was not aware of everything involved in making the community commodities run fluently. However, what I did have was a great crew of guys who worked in most cases, seamlessly to get things done. In turn these men and women were very receiving of all the questions I had regarding the infrastructure, finance, safety, and future of the water and wastewater facilities. I was a young man with my future in mind as an up-and-coming water and wastewater operation specialist with many questions. My superintendent was very informative on an entry level perspective and guided me to learn and achieve my certifications. I cannot express enough however, that the hands-on for me was huge! I was able to put the books and education into real world application! It seems as if the first time on a water leak, that the face full of water and soaking clothes was a rite of passage into the world of clean water distribution. I passed that ritual apparently. We all had a great laugh and continued our repair with smiles. In the end, I learned the importance of creating enough room around the main to place our repair, cleaning the main from tuberculation, identifying the pipe material itself, identifying the type of leak, the ground material it was buried in, its effects on the line, the particular repair needed to fix the leak, and applying the repair, which at the time was a 24" "temporary" band clamp. After the repair we backfilled carefully with proper material and called it a day, but throughout the whole process every question I had was answered to the best of their ability without making me feel like I was an idiot. You know where I wasn't? - I wasn't on the bank watching silently afraid to ask anything. There were no dumb questions for an inquisitive mind like mine. I was in it! Learning hands-on. I wasn't on the mower avoiding the whole issue altogether, so I didn't get wet or dirty. Now we all need employees to do all sorts of things throughout our communities that seem mundane, but if we allow ourselves to just simply do it to get it done, then we leave out the young men and women who are standing on the bank with a million questions that may be forgotten by the time they get a chance to get into the hole and apply their hands on actual repairs or operations.

I'm also not just referring to repairs. This is about all things municipal! Take them with you when you get your seemingly mundane samples and show them the proper technique firsthand. Take them with you to the effluent of your wastewater plant and show them the outfall and the importance of the structure there. Take them to the oxidation ditch, or inside of the clarifier. Allow them to help on the lift pump repair, or the panel box switch replacements. Take them to the storage tanks and show them the dangers of climbing that dreadful ladder in the middle of winter and show them the interior tank floats and mixers. Allow them to utilize the demo saw and show them the

proper safety precautions involved. Take them to another village or town and assist in their traffic control with guidance to allow that towns young men or women to get in the hole and utilize our shared services! Take them to the wells or spring houses and show them exactly how the water is drawn or received. Show them the importance of watershed into those areas. Hand them the ratchet and allow them to crank that Hymax down until the water stops leaking past it. Take them to the office and show them the prints and how far you've come from the 1930's hand drawn books that had only names listed where people lived for reference and let them be glad that the newest 1990's prints show the actual addresses! They'll get a kick out of that one along with a sign of relief!

Operation specialists are becoming harder and harder to come by particularly in small systems. There are many actions operation specialists can do to make their jobs easier and the "rite of passage" is just one way to allow our interested up-and-coming young operation specialists to take the load off the seemingly mundane situations. We cannot just leave our younger workers who are interested in the industry standing on the banks waiting for our retirement to come along so they can just "figure it out" when it becomes their responsibility. Getting them into the real hands-on work without making them loathe the issues will greatly aid our industries "up-and-coming" young men and women. Let's be diligent in applying safety and lift each other up this year with the utmost respect for safety and educational hands-on experience that aids in our daily practices and future and current operation specialists. See you all in the field! 💧💧💧



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