

President's Comments

By Kay Curtin

This weekend I was given the opportunity to fly over part of Minnesota. Looking down at all the hundreds of beautiful frozen lakes, the rivers and streams, cities and farms, I was once again reminded as to why we in the wastewater treatment professions go to work every day. How lucky we are to have these resources surrounding us! Even if we aren't nature or sports enthusiasts, that water sparkling up at my plane serves to recharge our groundwater, which is in turn our drinking water – our life source.



I firmly believe that the next few years are going to be a turning point for our profession. The massive amounts of retirements, the reduction of water and wastewater technical school and college courses, and the fact that few career counselors are aware of the jobs awaiting young men and women are already stretching employers to the max. While at MCES, I volunteered at a Career Day at a local technical college. I was to speak on working in the environmental science field. Only two young girls showed up for my presentation, and the person setting up the program told them it was for the field of agriculture. They wanted to raise small animals. Well, I guess we wastewater operators (i.e. bug farmers) raise some pretty small animals ourselves. When I told the attendees about what we WWTP operators do, they were extremely interested. They had no idea! This should be a wake-up call to teachers, career counselors, and my fellow wastewater professionals. Get the word out.

Some larger cities have intern programs, which is a win-win situation. The future employee, while working at an entry level wage, receives hands-on training while the employer is not committed to employ them if things don't work out. Why are we not utilizing this more?

Small towns have a unique challenge. While traveling through northern Wisconsin, I began asking about the benefits that are provided by the towns and was amazed at how many operators had no health insurance or retirement. Young people with children are not going to stay in a position such as that once they are licensed and experienced. If the trillions of dollars that our president is promising for infrastructure actually comes to fruition, city councils and town boards need to realize that their employees are assets, too, and treat them as such. A revolving wheel of new untrained employees is a disaster waiting to happen.

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Which leads me to my favorite subject – training. On-line training works in a pinch, but attending a training session or meeting taught by experienced professionals provides so much more. Just the networking aspect is a wealth of knowledge. You can raise your hand, ask a question, and stay after the presentation to speak further with the presenter. Minnesota training is specifically designed for the Minnesota operator, and believe me, there are plenty of differences between states. MWOA provides excellent, affordable training in their regional meetings and conferences. Do you, as operators, want to see us provide even more? If so, please contact me. My number is 715.340.8827 and email is kay.curtin@gmail.com. We would appreciate your thoughts on developing the MWOA of the future. Because, if my crystal ball is indicating correctly, we're going to need to provide training and assistance at a record level.

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