

# Who is Going to Take My Place?

By Ken Halvorsen, Sourcewater Specialist

I believe we can all agree we had a really good Spring Conference at Kearney in March. Pat does an excellent job putting all the pieces together so that no one realizes how much work it takes. I, also, appreciate that we get real meals with real place settings.

Back to my point, it seems all of the sideline discussions I had with folks at the conference ended the same way most of them have the past few years. The main point of the conversation being, "I plan to retire in a few years and who is going to take my place?" Granted, it is not the operator's problem who their system replaces them with, but the majority have pride in their system because of all the time and work they've put into it.

Another concern is, "They won't find anybody to do this for the pay I get." This is probably the greatest obstacle in replacing retiring operators. Quite often the system's options are hiring someone retired who will work part time or hiring two people that will work part time. Systems have gotten by paying lower wages because their operator is not going to quit. He has lived in the community all his life and is not going anywhere. This leads us to the next problem. These systems have not needed to budget for higher wages. Budgeting for higher wages could be difficult due to income issues.

Possibly a larger problem is finding a candidate who is willing to be on call twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week. This appears to be a greater issue than that of wages. As we know, having SCADA monitoring and cell phones capable of monitoring the entire system has made that part of the position less restrictive, but it is still part of the job.

Finally, in my travels around the state, I have had a number of conversations with operators who tell me their boards or supervisors do not understand how difficult it will be to find a competent and reliable replacement. One operator I have met makes it a point to pick up cigarette butts off the street. Folks could eat dinner off the floor of his treatment plant. It sounds like his board does not appreciate everything he does. They feel if he leaves, it would be easy to find someone to take his place. Really?

It may sound like I am preaching to the choir. Just maybe this will be left on the board table, and then someone might accidentally read it.

If you have any questions about source water protection issues, please give me a call at 402-607-9750.