

Planning for the Future

By Mike Stanzel, Circuit Rider

Well, I hope you all had a good summer and are getting prepared for fall and winter. I know this can be a busy time of year.

Last week I had the honor of attending a retirement reception for an operator whom I've had the pleasure of working with a lot over the past 7 years. It was fantastic to see the smile on his face knowing he had only 3 days of work left. It was held at the community center where they served coffee and cake and was also advertised on the town's marquee. Everyone in town was invited to stop in to congratulate him and wish him good luck. It was very humbling to see such a big crowd.

This situation is a perfect example of how the operator gave the board plenty of notice of his retirement date. The Mayor and Town Board took a proactive approach and hired a new employee a year prior so that he/she could obtain the proper training and certifications and the town was not left hanging!

So here is a big question that City Councils and Village Boards need to ask themselves: Who are we going to get to replace our water operator who's been with the City/Village for awhile? How are we going to get the new person trained and certified? And the biggest question is: How are we going to pay for this training? If the original operator is still around, he/she can train the new person. But what if the original operator suddenly retires, gets sick or simply just quits?

City and Village boards need to realize how valuable their operators are. As operators you have obtained much information and knowledge over the years about various aspects of your City or Village. I would guarantee that each and every water operator out there knows something about their water system that no one else knows, whether it is knowing how to shut off a particular section of water main that isn't on the map or being able to find the shut off valve for the

old theater that is located two blocks down and one block over. Regardless of how long you have been there you have an invaluable amount of knowledge that only comes with experience. So the longer you get to work with and train a new operator, the better off your city/village will be.

Cities/villages are going to need to budget for this. They are probably going to need to do some restructuring since adding an additional employee can be extremely costly especially if they are on a tight budget. A city/village's fiscal budget year can vary. If you're thinking about retiring, find out when the budget year starts and give your employer plenty of notice. Six months to a year is not unreasonable.

So please share this article with your Board and Council members and encourage them to get a plan of action ready, in case you are planning to retire.