



**Tis the Season**  
**By: Don Craig, IRWA Executive Director**

**December 2024**  
**Newsletter**

December 2024 Newsletter

It's a busy time of the year for everyone, and especially for all of us at the Illinois Rural Water Association. Our entire field staff has done a very good job, all year long, of providing great and needed one-on-one technical assistance and training in so many different fields that affect rural water and wastewater system operators, administrators, board members...and indirectly their customers. And, also, Denise and Heather continue to do a great job in their everyday administrative work demands at the office that also help to sustain this organization as one of the top state affiliates of the National Rural Water Association.

Our bi-monthly board meeting at our office, will be coming up the third Wednesday of December, to be followed by an annual board/staff Christmas luncheon in Taylorville. That being said, I want to remind our member systems and their staff, to not hesitate to contact your district board representative if you have any concerns or matters that may need to be heard by the entire board; as well as to contact staff personnel if you are having water and/or wastewater systems issues that they may be of help with. We do not profess to have all the answers, but we will do all we can to help our member systems in any way possible, within our means.

Heather has been doing her very good and annual spearheading of the preparations for our annual conference to be held in Effingham in February. Make sure to look for the packet for this event, coming through the mail. You can also get information and details about it on our website at: [www.ilrwa.org](http://www.ilrwa.org), and through our social media outlets as well. As we always say each year, whether you're a vendor or system attendee, please do not procrastinate on getting your registrations in and making your lodging plans, if needed. At this time, we have been notified of, and are fortunate to have the newly elected President of the National Rural Water Association, Phil Combs scheduled to be and speak at the conference this year.

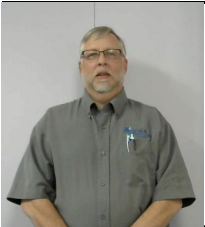
Roger and I will be flying out to San Diego, to attend the annual Executive (and Deputy Executive) Director's meeting in January. We'll be going over many items

pertinent to the day to day operation and management of state rural water associations, but also we will be going over a lot of information and needed data prior to us, and some board members, traveling to Washington, D.C. in February for NRWA's annual Rural Water Rally. At that event, state association affiliate administrators and board members, will meet with their state specific U.S. Representatives and Senators (or their aides), to review all the important legislative actions that are important to our rural water/wastewater systems in regard to regulations, funding options, etc....as well as ask for the continued backing of the work that the National Rural Water Association and its state affiliates, like the Illinois Rural Water Association, do for small/rural utilities in their state, and across the nation.

Tis the Season...and just another busy winter schedule for IRWA, and the work we've been doing since 1979.

**IRWA'S MISSION STATEMENT**

**"Protecting and preserving the water and wastewater resources of Rural Illinois through education, representation and on-site technical assistance"**



## Our Biggest Challenge

By: **Dave McMillan, IRWA Training Specialist**

Recently, while at a training program, I was asked by a colleague to expound on what I felt was the most significant challenge faced by small community water/wastewater systems in Illinois (maybe the country). Laying the framework for this question, I believe that the person thought that I was somewhat positioned to have contemplated this topic in my nearly forty years in the water industry and lifetime as a “redneck.”

As we debated the many problems faced by these systems, other associates joined the conversation, expressing their views, became depressed, and exited the conversation. The concerns included, but were not limited to, the rigors of statutory/regulatory compliance, local political unwillingness to recognize the importance and value of water/wastewater treatment, and lack of funding needed to maintain infrastructure (let alone improve it). Ultimately, I believe we (or at least I) settled on the lack of technical capacity within small water/wastewater systems as being the greatest future challenge in our industry.

The lack of properly educated, credentialed and experienced water/wastewater operational staff at small rural systems is a systemic problem resulting (I believe) from the diminishing populations in rural communities. Generally, once reaching adulthood, most young folks seem to seek opportunities in larger communities. Some go away to trade school or college, never to return. With this said, the water and wastewater industry is in competition for a shrinking candidate pool.

To add insult to injury, *most* young people are smarter than us lifers. They recognize what demanding jobs we have. They understand the level of responsibility water/wastewater industry professionals have and that this is not necessarily reflected in offered salaries. They also observed that our jobs are not

necessarily nine-to-five and may include some dirt under our fingernails on occasion.

The obvious follow-up question is, how do we solve this problem? Well, I have never professed to be a smart man (some of you would probably go farther). But, if we are going to begin to stem the current trend in losing more people than we gain, it seems to me that we need to hit this issue on all fronts. Programs like IRWA’s Apprenticeship Program and SIU-E ERTC’s One-Year Operator Training Program are tremendous opportunities for some. Alternatively, for folks that prefer remote learning, Blackhawk College’s Operator Training Programs is a great structured program. We certainly need to spread the work about these programs.

I also think we need to drum up business in our day-to-day activities. In the past our industry has been satisfied to be out of sight and out of mind. We really need to start making our communities aware of the importance of delivering safe water and protecting our communities through properly treating wastewater. College isn’t for everyone (me included, as reflected in my grades many years ago) and the water/wastewater industry provides a unique employment opportunity. We really need to make young people understand that this is a job that will allow them to make a difference in their communities. Arguably, our small towns may be able to afford the loss of their grocery store, their hardware store or their lumber yard. They cannot survive without a water supply or publicly owned treatment works. Let candidates know that the job can sometimes be outwardly thankless. But, without water and wastewater operators our communities will perish.



## IRWA Support Letters Are Needed

IRWA employees are dedicated in helping the water and wastewater systems throughout the state in making onsite visits and providing technical assistance in helping to ensure your systems have safe and quality water. Please take a moment to thank any or all of the IRWA employees who have helped your system by writing an appreciation letter on your letterhead and mail to:

Illinois Rural Water Association  
P.O. Box 49  
Taylorville, IL 62568



## GPS Project

By: Roger Now, IRWA Deputy Director

One of my assigned duties in my position is to do GPS field work on water and wastewater systems. I am out in the field collecting GPS data and attributes of the water or wastewater system. I have come full circle working with GPS collection and field work. In my first career, which was about thirty years ago, I was in the agricultural industry in central Illinois doing soil testing, spreading fertilizer, and mapping out farm fields using GPS/GIS mapping. Twenty-four years ago, my family and I made the move to southern Illinois to take a job as GPS specialist in mapping out farm fields for fertilizer applications and performed GPS and GIS for a field tiling company. That consisted of me mapping out the tile lines so a map could be presented to the farmer. Then I decided to change careers to enter the utility business working for a small village and now with IRWA.

I have been busy with GPS Data Collection and Mapping Project with Millstone Public Water District. Millstone PWD is a very large water district population of 5,600 in the southeastern part of Illinois. They are in and around the Shawnee National Forest in Pope and Johnson Counties. This project I am only locating valves, hydrants, meters, pumpstations, storage tanks/towers, and other features. We would usually draw in water lines, but it would be very difficult to accomplish that with Millstone PWD. Their water lines don't go down roads, they go across the field or wherever they could miss all the rock in the ground to be able to install water mains. The meter location might be one house in the front of the structure then the next meter would be behind the structure. One big plus is that Millstone PWD brought back an employee who retired a couple of years ago to help me with locations of meters, valves, and hydrants. He had worked for the water district for 40 years so with his experience and knowledge of the system it is so beneficial. There are around 3,378 features that need physical location and attributes logged. I have 781 of these completed. A good day is collecting up to 100 features since there is so much driving to collect the features.

All the years of being a circuit rider I would only be driving down the highways in that area, but this last month have been down many country roads, and it is a beautiful part of the state. I have seen so many horses, deer, and other wildlife doing this project. At times, I have had to jump fences, greet horses, walk through brush, walk down long roads, and watch out for angry dogs. My estimation is I have still around thirty days to finish this project, and I have completely enjoyed doing this kind of work.

I use the Trimble GeoHX handheld receiver to collect the features. The GeoHX is engineered with H-star technology enabling the GeoHX to acquire sub-foot post-processed accuracy. The unit combines an antenna GPS receiver and a handheld computer into a single ruggedized unit. A minimum of 4 satellites must be present to collect a feature. The lowest number of satellites has been 10, typically it is around 14-17. Once the features are collected, they are saved to a computer then transferred into Arc-GIS maps. The water system then can visually see the collected features and maps through Diamond Maps.

Why should your system have a GPS/GIS project? The biggest benefit is knowing the location of systems valves, hydrants, meters, manholes, and other collectable features. This would be a first step in developing an asset management plan, which we know IEPA would like to have every system to have an asset management plan. Another plus would be to have updated maps to help assist new employees. The system personnel can use their mobile devices to look at the map in the field with Diamond Maps.

IRWA has a few more projects lined up to be completed after the first of the year or early spring, but we are available to take on more. If this is something that would interest you or have questions contact Don Craig or Roger Noe.  
HAPPY HOLIDAYS

**HAPPY HOLIDAYS FROM THE IRWA  
BOARD & STAFF!**

**THE IRWA OFFICE WILL BE CLOSED ON:  
WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 24  
THURSDAY, DECEMBER 25**



**Illinois Rural Water Association  
3305 Kennedy Road  
P.O. Box 49  
Taylorville, IL 62568  
217-287-2115**

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QUALITY ON TAP

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**February 18-20, 2025**

**Holiday Inn/Keller Convention Center—Effingham, IL**

**Host Hotel is SOLD OUT!**

- 12.75 Credit Hours Available
- Water and Wastewater Sessions
  - 109 Exhibitors
  - Cash Prizes
  - Sportsman's Raffle

Exhibitor registration is open. Attendee registration will be sent out in the mail and be available on-line soon. Please visit [www.ilrwa.org](http://www.ilrwa.org) for credit card payments and printable registration forms.