

Maine Water News

A Publication of the Maine Water Utilities Association

January 2014, Number 173

The Wisdom of Greek Philosophy

Don Gobeil, 2013 President

As is customary, the January Maine Water News article represents the final installment for the outgoing President. I must admit that I've enjoyed this aspect of my year in office. In most instances in the past, the outgoing President simply steps off the soapbox and refocuses their attention to resuming their normal day to day work life. For me however, my expiring term falls much closer to the end of my career than for most other Presidents, and as such is probably more melancholy since it represents another tangible example of the inexorable march of time. But fear not, this article will not degenerate into a career retrospective filled with "I remember when" anecdotes. But I will provide one example of the perspective I've gained from longevity. I started my career by pouring molten lead in pipe joints and now find myself stressing about whether we can meet the 0.25% weighted average for lead content in brass material required by the Reduction of Lead in Drinking Water Act. Some people (mainly within the EPA) would call this progress, but I'm tempted to call it something else.

My tenure with the Maine Water Utilities Association has not rivaled that of many who came before me in either time or contribution, but it has been long enough for me to acquire some knowledge of its history, and an outlook of its future prospects. The history of the MWUA is well known to most of us as an organization that has endured and prospered since 1925. Formed by a core group of superintendents who recognized the need to work together, the association has long functioned as the pre-eminent advocate for the water supply profession in Maine. Through bi-monthly meetings, regular training sessions, legislative lobbying and mutual support and collaboration, the association is poised to remain a relevant and essential resource to its members.

But what does the future hold? An obscure Greek philosopher named Heraclitus is credited with giving us the term "*The only thing that is constant is*

change". It's easy to see the wisdom of this phrase when looking at the past, and easy to surmise that it will be a constant in the future as well. Will the MWUA be the same organization in 5 years as it is today? In 10 years and beyond? Based upon its long history, the easy answer is yes - why not? But one fairly recent industry development that may signal that it won't necessarily be business as usual for the MWUA in the future is the formation and growth of regional water councils. In 2005, the Southern Maine Regional Water Council (SMRWC) was formed to encourage regional solutions and enhance member cooperation. More recently, the Five Rivers Regional Water Council has been incorporated in the mid-coast area patterned after the SMRWC. There is also a more informal group that meets in the Bangor area, and the potential for other coalitions to spring up over time as well.

What effect (if any) will the advent of these organizations have on the traditional role of the MWUA in the future? Will regional system interconnections, bulk purchasing agreements and tailored mutual aid agreements foster a more tightly intertwined regional view and perspective on issues on the part of its members? Is it possible (or even likely) that there may be statewide issues that arise that would be viewed differently in southern Maine than they would in other parts of the State? Will the philosophical dialogue we've always had regarding how issues may impact big systems vs. small systems now morph to include geographic elements as well? We've already seen regional water councils offer docket comments directly in the Regulatory Reform debate, and can expect that this type of involvement will become common in the future. It is clear that the mechanism by which the MWUA has formulated its advocacy positions in the past will require change to the extent that it will need to consider regional water councils as an emerging source of opinion and ideas. Additionally, we must be mindful that wedge issues may surface that potentially could make statewide consensus difficult to achieve, which would be a departure to one of MWUA's cornerstone

Maine Water News
is published bimonthly by

Maine Water Utilities Association
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Material of interest to the water supply
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Copy deadline is the 15th day of month
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capabilities, i.e. the ability to speak clearly for the water supply industry in this state.

This metamorphosis of how individual utilities organize will be interesting to watch in the future and will doubtless have an impact on this association. My view is that the MWUA does many things well (legislative advocacy, training, serving as a centralized clearinghouse for information and moving the industry forward through a vibrant professional committee structure) and will continue to succeed in validating the importance of the MWUA model well into the future. But I'm equally certain that the manner in which we have gone about the task of achieving the mission of the MWUA since 1925 will change as well. After all, Heraclitus says that we can expect it.

As a closing thought, I'd like to thank the MWUA, its members and my own organization for allowing me the opportunity to serve in this capacity. It has been a worthwhile and enriching experience, one that has reaffirmed for me the underlying value and importance of this association. There will always be challenges facing our industry on many fronts, both internally and externally generated. But as long as our industry professionals continue to do the good work that they do, our association will thrive and succeed.

The December Meeting

It's not every bimonthly meeting when you can stand on the deck of your room in the morning and nod to a lobsterman going out to haul. The Nonantum at Kennebunkport is that kind of place - a very nice venue for the December meeting.

Following the welcome to town, the system overview that reminded us of the aging work force, and the usual updates, we had the pleasure of listening to the annual committee reports. The association covers a lot of ground in a year's time and that would not be possible without the dedicated efforts of the committee members. The MWUA committee structure benefits all. It also provides a unique opportunity for water professionals to gain insight and valuable information through networking and to develop their individual skills.

After the break we tuned our attention to the topic of succession planning.

Chris Curtis, a recent graduate of JETCC's Maine Management Candidate School, provided an overview of that year long program. He stressed the breadth and depth of the topics covered, the value of the networking opportunities and he encouraged others to take avail themselves of the course if possible.

Jack Jolls, General Manager of R.I. Analytical Laboratories, Inc. provided a very comprehensive and informative discussion of knowledge management and succession planning. Among other things, he covered the skilled workers gap this country is facing, the components of effective utility management, leadership styles, succession planning models, and implementation of action plans.

Jolls has had a long career in the water business. The information and, particularly, the experiences he wove into his remarks made it very relevant.

His presentation was a perfect example of why members should avail themselves of the opportunity to attend the association's bi-monthly meetings. Staff will do their best to summarize his talk in the 2014 Journal.



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Membership Elects Directors for 2014

At the October bimonthly meeting the membership voted to accept the nominations for 2014 Directors, as presented by the Nominating Committee:

Alan Hitchcock of Caribou Utilities District
Frank Kearney of Old Town Water District

Following that vote the membership then proceeded to elect Hitchcock and Kearney for three year terms on the Board of Directors.

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Longfellow Elected President

At the January meeting of the Board of Directors Jefferson Longfellow was elected President of the Association. Longfellow, former Chair of the Program Committee, is the District Engineer of the Kennebec Water District.

Frank Kearney, Superintendent of the Old Town Water District, was elected Vice President and Jon Ziegra, Manager, Boothbay Region Water District, was elected Treasurer.

The Board appointed Executive Director Jeffrey McNelly Secretary.

The Directors also accepted, with regret, the resignation of Director Alan Hitchcock. In accordance with the by-laws, the Directors will select a replacement. At the next regular election, a Director will be elected to serve the remainder of the unexpired term.



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Board Votes to Bring By-Law Change to Membership

At the November Board meeting the Directors, acting on a recommendation from the Nominating Committee, voted unanimously to allow for one board member to be an Associate member.

An amendment to the by-laws is being prepared, in anticipation of a vote on the matter being taken at the April bimonthly meeting in Mechanic Falls.

In accordance with the by-laws, notice of the proposed change must be provided to the membership at least ten (10) days prior to the vote. That will be accomplished via a notice in the March issue of Maine Water News.

In Memorial

Joe O'Brien

Joseph C. O'Brien, 54, passed away Dec. 26, 2013 after a short battle with cancer. He was born in Lubec on June 23, 1959.

Joe joined the Lubec Fire Department as a junior firefighter at the age of eleven, and remained active in the department until his death.

He was also a member of both the Lubec Police and Lubec Ambulance Service where he was an E.M.T. For the past twenty nine years he was the manager of the Lubec Water District.

He is survived by Julie, his wife of thirty one years, two sons, a grandson, three sisters, a brother, and many nieces, nephews and special friends.

His true passion has always been spending time with his family, with whom he just celebrated a wonderful Christmas.


He will be greatly missed by many.



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Bruce Goucher

Bruce Goucher, Operations Supervisor of the Greater Augusta Utility District, died January 24, 2014, after battling cancer for well over a year. He was 56.

He worked for the Augusta Water District and finally GAUD for over 33 of those years having joined them in May of 1980. Between Bruce and his guys, they literally built much of the drinking water system and

repaired dozens, maybe hundreds, of water main breaks over the years.

He was a member of the MWUA Program Committee and in February of 2013 he received the association's Lifetime Achievement Award.

A more likable guy could not be found. His legacy will be that we will be talking about him for years to come.

Bruce is survived by his wife, Patricia, 3 children, 3 grandchildren, 2 brothers and 3 sisters.



many opportunities to save money by reducing complicated parts inventories and minimizing manpower expense for repairs.

To Hunt, it was obvious that standardizing its network of fire hydrants into one system would make their lives and jobs easier. The simple inventory of parts offered by the Eddy fire hydrant and the fact that one person can repair them were deciding factors that compelled the district to convert 100 percent of the Bath Water District to Eddy hydrants.

Clow Valve Company salesman Brett Johnson and Hunt collaborated on the change-out, with Hunt insisting that private hydrants in his district be changed as well. Earlier this past fall, the six year conversion of the district's 356 public and 61 private hydrants was completed.

BWD likes the hydrant for its ease of use, breakaway flange and its ability to open and close quickly yet controllably under pressure, minimizing water hammer. Also important to the Bath community is the hydrant's traditional look, which fits the landscape of the historic sea-fearing town that hosts many tourists each year and is home to both artists and photographers. Says Hunt: "Eddy hydrants fit our community's needs and personality perfectly."



Bath Water District Employees Bruce Gardner, Distribution System Manager; Brian Moody, Distribution System Team Leader; and Distribution System Technicians Jeremy Balducci, Brian Murray and Peter Hudson, and an Eddy Fire Hydrant in Front of Bath City Hall

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Bath Water District Overhauls Hydrant System

During his eight years as the Bath Water District superintendent, Trevor Hunt has researched the effectiveness of his district's fire hydrant system. He reviewed more than 80 years of documented purchasing decisions, repairs and changes, making note of the time and expense involved in each hydrant repair. He saw

Second Session of 126th Features Compression of a Number of Important Issues

Legislative activity during the first month of the session focused on carry over bills; in addition a number of pieces of "emergency legislation" were printed and hearings have been held on some of those.

The Energy Utilities and Technology (EUT) Committee was faced with the task of working more

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than 20 carry over bills, with a leadership imposed deadline of January 24th to report them out.

LD 1532 An Act to Provide Model Language for Standard Sewer District Charters had both a hearing and a work session in the EUT Committee. MWUA and MWWCA spent a considerable amount of time evaluating the impact of this bill. We expressed concerns associated with trustee elections and a provision that a local referendum be required (in addition to the referendum required to approve creation of the district) in order to grant lien authority. The committee heard those concerns, amended the bill and voted it out unanimously, subject to final language review.

LD 965 An Act to Improve Maine's Underground Facility Damage Prevention Program continues to be on a very tumultuous road. This bill, which was submitted by the association, seeks to create a Dig Safe Advisory Board and it also requires that persons who own underground facilities and who are not Dig Safe system members register their facilities with the Public Utilities Commission and provide the commission with current 24-hour contact information for purposes of notification regarding excavations.

Amendments to LD 965 which have been offered seek a different makeup of the advisory board, similar to two previous workgroups which have almost solely focused on contractor convenience. The other thrust of the amendment advocates is mandatory Dig Safe system membership for all owners of underground facilities – or at least water and sewer systems and municipalities.

Municipalities have been reluctant to embrace the concept of being required to join, and pay a portion of the costs of, a system that notifies them when someone is proposing to conduct excavation in their streets.

The Maine Municipal Association has been subjected to some heavy handed tactics during discussions which have taken place over the past several weeks. Their weekly Legislative Bulletin, printed a few days after a fiery exchange between their legislative advocate and the House chair of the EUT Committee, featured an article titled “Dig Safe Indignity” which



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referenced, amongst many other things “abuse directed at MMA”.

What the LD 965 outcome might be is anyone’s guess. The association will continue to focus on the implementation/improvement of process components that can incrementally improve the Dig Safe law and the underground damage prevention program.



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On a more positive note, LD 826 An Act to Eliminate the Opt-out Charges for Smart Meters was unanimously voted Ought Not to Pass by the EUT Committee.

A subcommittee of the State and Local Government Committee met throughout the summer in an effort to address issues associated with discontinued and abandoned roads, as set forth in LD 1177. An amendment to the bill was developed and a hearing and work sessions have been held. This has been a contentious process. The last report is that the committee plans on reporting out a bill which contains elements on which there is agreement; they plan one working on other aspects and hope to incorporate at least some of those before the bill reaches the floor.

On the Freedom of Access Act front, and specifically as it relates to abuse of the act by serial request filers, the Right to Know Advisory Committee is recommending legislation to the Judiciary Committee. That legislation would create an option for a public body, agency or official to seek relief from overly burdensome requests by filing an action in Superior Court seeking a determination whether the request may be denied.

In response to the rapid expansion of gas facilities in many areas, the association is attempting to submit an after deadline bill to enact more comprehensive design and installation standards for natural gas infrastructure. Meetings have been held with legislative leadership and it is expected that there will be

conversations with the natural gas representatives in an attempt to develop standards that provide existing utilities better protection.


The association is awaiting the final Regulatory Reform Plan for Consumer-Owned Water Utilities, due to be delivered to the EUT Committee at the end of January. A number of meetings have been held to discuss this subject and it is expected that additional meeting will be convened before any legislation is heard.



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