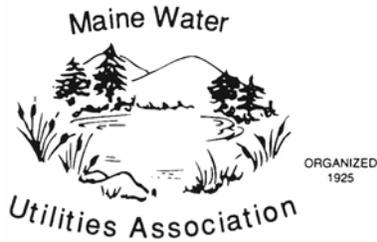


# MAINE



# WATER

# NEWS

November 2005

A Publication of the Maine Water Utilities Association

Number 125

## Is Benchmarking For You?

*Judy Kelley, President*

Many of us heard the presentation of Scott Minor, Augusta Water District and Dale Glidden, Augusta Sanitary District, at the October membership meeting about their past year in merging/consolidating the two districts. Kudos are due to both organizations and their employees as they have gone through some major changes, turmoil and uncertainty, with probably more to come.

A point of discussion was what drove the merger...politics or economics? While there is probably no clear cut answer to that, the takeaway point that I took home was "Would my utility systems withstand the scrutiny of a potential merger?" Have I found every cost savings or every economy of scale that I can, while still providing high quality customer service and maintaining quality and motivated employees? Do we keep in regular contact with our town managers and local municipal departments and work together as much as possible? Do I regularly benchmark key performance measures against national or statewide standards and explore why I may be out of sync with the norms?

Here are some simple economic benchmarks that you can compute for your water utility.

(1) **Customers per employee** - This is a very broad efficiency measure of one of the biggest costs of a water utility, i.e. labor. It is simply the number of customers in your system divided by the number of fulltime employees you have. The higher the number, the greater the overall efficiency of your utility and your labor force, theoretically. This ratio ranges from over 700 for some of the largest US water utilities, to a number in the 100's. This ratio tends to be lower for smaller water utilities, simply because it can be difficult to gain the best economies of scale around a small system and a small customer base. Using a 2003 Maine PUC data base, some of the "best" Maine systems are over 500 customers per employee, and some of the "worst" are at 150

or lower. What's your number? If it is low, do you know why and is there anything you can do about it?

(2) **Operations and maintenance cost per customer** - This is another very broad measure of the annual operating costs of a water utility. This ratio is the O&M costs of your water utility (line 29 on page W-2 in your annual PUC report) divided by the number of customers in your system. The lower the number, in this case, implies a more efficient water system and operation. Granted, there are many reasons why this number can fluctuate within a fairly broad range depending on the water system. Nationally, the "best" numbers are in the \$150 range, and the "worst" numbers are in the \$400+ range, and Maine systems reflect this same range. What's your number?

There are many more ways to benchmark your water utility, but the above two are some very broad measures that might get you thinking about doing things differently. So whether driven by economics or politics, if I know, or suspect, there are ways to do things differently, I would rather drive that change with the best interest of the customers, employees and communities at hand, rather than have someone else drive the change. And, we all know that, periodically, the season will arrive where the political winds swirl around our utility, asking if a different ownership model makes sense. If the winds find nothing to improve since these steps have already been taken, that wind will likely die down to a light breeze.

I will end with some very heartfelt **Congratulations** to Scott Minor, outgoing General Manager of the Augusta Water District, for receiving the MWUA Jeff Nixon Distinguished Service Award at our recent October membership meeting. Scott was recognized for his almost-18 years of service at the District, his participation in MWUA, including a directorship and presidency, and his overall outstanding contribution to the Maine water utility profession. This is a well-deserved award to a man of integrity and class, an engineer's engineer...to repeat a few of the accolades mentioned at the award presentation.

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Material of interest to the water supply profession will be considered for publication. Copy deadline is the 15<sup>th</sup> day of month preceding publication.

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## **February Trade Show in the Works**

The association is gearing up for the 2006 February Meeting and Trade Show, to be held February 5 – 7, 2006 at the Holiday Inn by the Bay and the Cumberland County Civic Center.

Planning for the Monday technical sessions is well underway. A presentation titled “A Healthy and Productive Workplace,” will focus on mitigating health care expenditure, decreasing workplace injuries and increasing workplace productivity. “Working Within the Maine Department of Transportation Right-of-Way” will highlight cooperative collaboration with the MDOT during construction projects. Additional sessions are being developed that will address other topic areas.

The Trade Show Preview will once again take place on Monday evening. On Tuesday the trade show will run from 8:00 am – 3:00 pm and will feature the best of new water works products along with the old and faithful merchandise. The complimentary luncheon, provide by the association’s Associate members, will provide an opportunity for attendees to take a break from either the technical modules or palavering with the exhibitors.

New in 2006 will be trade show floor product demonstrations, targeting T&D, treatment, monitoring, control systems and office support operations. If you’re a vendor and would like to submit a product for consideration, submission forms are available on line at [www.mwua.org](http://www.mwua.org).

For many of us this is a great opportunity to head south for a few days, during the heart of winter. Make plans now to attend and be watching the mail for conference information.

## **Dig Safe Changes on the Horizon**

Public Law 2005, Chapter 334 was recently enacted by the First Session of the 122<sup>nd</sup> Maine Legislature. It requires the Maine PUC to “reduce the incidence of damage of newly installed underground facilities in active construction areas...” A Notice of inquiry was issued on September 27 in an effort to facilitate that effort. Various concepts and proposal were presented in that inquiry.

Key points of the proposal of interest to water systems are provisions that require the operator to notify the Dig Safe system within 5 days of the installation of new facilities in an excavation site and that excavators request a ticket from Dig Safe no less frequently than 30 days.

A technical conference on the docket was held on Oct 21<sup>st</sup>. The discussion at that session focused on the fact that, in order for the changes to be effective in addressing the problems, they need to be practicable and not overly complicated. Many spoke in favor of the 30 day ticket requirement coupled with a provision that operators mark the facilities at the time of installation and maintain those marks during the project.

Concerning the fact that many projects do not become the property of the local water utility until they are installed, tested, approved, etc., a Commission staffer was clear in stating that the responsibility for these facilities does not rest with the water system until they gain ownership.

The rules that will be forthcoming are major substantive rules, i.e. they will require approval of the legislature.



### Harry Smith Retires

The Belfast Water District said farewell to Superintendent Harry Smith on September 30, his last day of work. Coworkers, friends and associates gathered to wish him the best. The event capped off a 43 year career in the business. He came to the district in 1985, after working for the Manhattan (Kansas – not the Big Apple) system for 23 years.

Harry plans to spend his time woodworking, antiquing and being a granddad.



### Everett J. Prescott, Inc. Honored by Newcomen Society

The Augusta Civic Center hosted a Newcomen Society Luncheon on September 23, 2005 honoring Everett J. Prescott, Inc. Guests of honor and speakers at the event included Mr. Peter E. Prescott, CEO; Mr. Stanley G. McCurdy, COO; and Mr. Steven E. Prescott, President, Everett J. Prescott, Inc.

The Newcomen Society of the United States is a publicly-supported, tax-exempt, educational foundation for “the study and recognition of achievement in American business and the society it serves.”

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**Sebago Lake Land Reserve Ribbon Cutting**

**PWD Kicks Off Land Reserve**

On September 15<sup>th</sup> the Sebago Lake Land Reserve Grand Opening & Ribbon Cutting took place in Standish.

In 2004, the Portland Water District Board of Trustees adopted a land use policy that opens 1,700 acres of watershed protection land to the public. The policy calls for tighter restrictions at the shoreline to offset the increase in public access to large tracts farther away from the shore. Nine separate permitting kiosks have been erected to guide land users to trails and popular destinations.

Executive Director of Asset Planning and Management Chris Crovo noted that: "We have been pleased with the positive response to the new land use policy. We have worked closely with IF&W and neighbors to make sure it works for everyone".

Paul Hunt, Environmental Services Manager, focused on the benefits of the policy. "Outdoor enthusiasts will be able to enjoy recreation on undeveloped woodlands near Sebago Lake, a rare opportunity as Southern Maine's population grows and land is developed. And in turn these visitors can report suspicious activity or evidence of vandalism, enhancing the security of the water supply."

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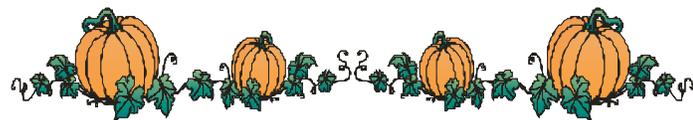
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## MWUA to Offer Complimentary Seminar for Exhibitors

The February conference is an important event for the association. It serves many purposes, one of the most important being an opportunity for vendors to display and market their products and services.

The MWUA Associate Members are an integral part of the association. Without their involvement, many events and activities just wouldn't happen.

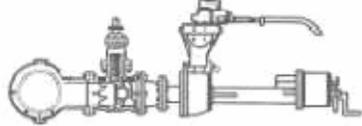
The association is thankful to have come upon an opportunity to assist vendors in being all they can be when it comes to exhibiting at trade shows.

Directly following the December bimonthly meeting lunch, MWUA will be sponsoring a "Successful Trade Show Exhibiting Seminar." The event will be held at the York Harbor Inn.

Exhibit Source of Maine, Inc. (d/b/a Nimlok Maine) will present this exhibiting seminar, highlighting the skills of: goal setting, pre-show strategies, exhibit design, working the show and post-show strategies.

There is no charge – however we would like to pre-register attendees. FMI: [www.mwua.org](http://www.mwua.org) or call the MWUA office at (207) 832-2263.

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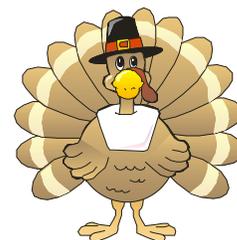


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**York Water District to Host December Meeting**

The York Harbor Inn in York, Maine will be the location of the association's December 8<sup>th</sup> bimonthly meeting. Join us for our annual business meeting consisting of committee reports, a report from the NEWWA State Director and a discussion on the 2006 MWUA Director Election results.

The technical program will include sessions highlighting Watershed Protection Through Ownership, Watershed Patrolling and Joint Chemical Purchasing. The district has historically been very proactive in these areas.

The program will conclude with a buffet luncheon.

The region has much to offer, particularly during the holiday season. Plan on attending – you won't be disappointed.

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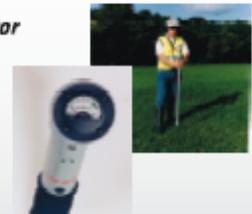


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