

# A Slight Change in Course After 37 Years

**W**ith this article, I say good-bye to many friends and associates in the water utility industry. Well, by “good-bye”, I mean as a director of the Kansas Rural Water Association. It was 37 years ago this March that I was first elected to serve on the KRWA board. It has been an incredible experience.

I reach deep into my heart in conveying a sincere appreciation to have been given the opportunity to be part of KRWA. KRWA has allowed me to meet thousands of people and also allowed me to participate on the National Rural Water Association board of directors.

As I write this last article as a KRWA director for *The Kansas Lifeline* magazine, here are some thoughts:

**First, “water” was the right choice for my career.** As a younger person, I had started in a different direction, spending time in the Navy stationed off Vietnam in the 60s, and then a job in a print shop in Topeka. I later learned of a job opening at Shawnee RWD 8;

I applied and was hired. I retired from that job in 2013.

**Two (or more) heads are better than one.** As I look back on my water career, I’m struck by how much better off water systems and others are because of KRWA’s collaboration – with other systems, other organizations, other agencies, legislators, etc. I am particularly impressed with the management of KRWA because the Association really took off in the early 80s. KRWA’s involvement on many pieces of legislation and its involvement with programs is of invaluable help to water and wastewater systems. KRWA has been and continues to be successful as an advocate for water districts and cities because KRWA board members and staff members have been and continue to be dedicated to KRWA’s mission: *Provide education and leadership necessary to enhance the effectiveness of Kansas’ water and wastewater utilities.*

It would not be with any personal ego that I would recite the scores of legislative agendas that KRWA has led or been



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involved in. KRWA has been a leader and has taken positions regardless of the politics that some might otherwise have placed before the interests of members. The Association’s work is by no means completed. There are numerous issues that KRWA is earnestly spending time on in Kansas and in Washington, as an affiliate of the National Rural Water Association.

## Do what you like doing best

One thing that I’ve enjoyed the most in my “water” career is taking photographs of water systems, water storage tanks and landscapes in Kansas. In earlier times, I had a dark room in our basement. With today’s digital technology, all that fuss and mess is ended. Just for kicks, I’m attending class at Washburn in of all things – Photoshop!

## Keeping up with the times

Kansas water systems are doing a pretty good job. I often lament that some people might believe that small water systems are all doomed. There are people who seem to be working in earnest to find ways to eliminate small systems. But, many small water systems can’t be more than they can be – and they need to continue service. It’s rare to hear of a water system in Kansas that is without service. The full story of that success is not appreciated. Much of the reason that so few water system problems becoming crisis

situations is due to KRWA staff members being out there working with the systems BEFORE the water pressure gets below 20 psi, or before the well runs dry. Without the tech assistance provided by KRWA, the story would be a lot different for many of these small systems. Funding through National Rural Water, the Kansas Water Office and KDHE is supplemented by KRWA to make that assistance possible.

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KRWA that has carried a big share of the water, so to speak. And KRWA will continue to carry the water.

What's ahead? While I plan to end what seems like a long tenure on the KRWA board, I am honored to continue to represent Kansas Rural Water on the National Rural Water Association board. The past 37 years with KRWA seem like a flash in time. I will continue to represent Kansas with pride,

**Always look ahead**

Yes, while there have been many successes by KRWA, I and other board members and KRWA staff know that there are other challenges ahead. First, KRWA does not have statutory authority to exist. KRWA responds to systems' needs; KRWA is governed by membership. The KRWA board and membership (and non-members alike) will always place the interests of systems first. KRWA speaks up for water systems. For example, KRWA is presently taking a stand on the Kansas Notification Center. KRWA is being joined by WaterOne and the League of Kansas Municipalities to work to ensure that the operation of a call center and how local utilities are charged is a process that is reasonable and efficient. It's the same on drinking water regulations, or fees that systems have to pay, and the seven (yes, seven) legislative sessions that KRWA spent lobbying for and testifying on the sales tax clarification. It's been

knowing that KRWA is today one of the strongest members of the National Rural Water family of state affiliates. I have every confidence that KRWA will continue on that same path.

I look forward to seeing you at the 2014 Annual Conference & Exhibition in Wichita, March 25 – 27. Meanwhile, "Thank you" for the opportunity to help KRWA "Set Sail For The Future!"

*Dennis Schwartz is the current President of KRWA. He retired on March 31, 2013 as General Manager of Shawnee RWD 8 since 1976. Dennis is a member of the Kansas Water Authority and has also been a director for National Rural Water since 1992. He was a member of the Water Industry Coordinating Council from 1996-2002 and EPA's National Drinking Water Advisory Council from 1999-2005.*



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