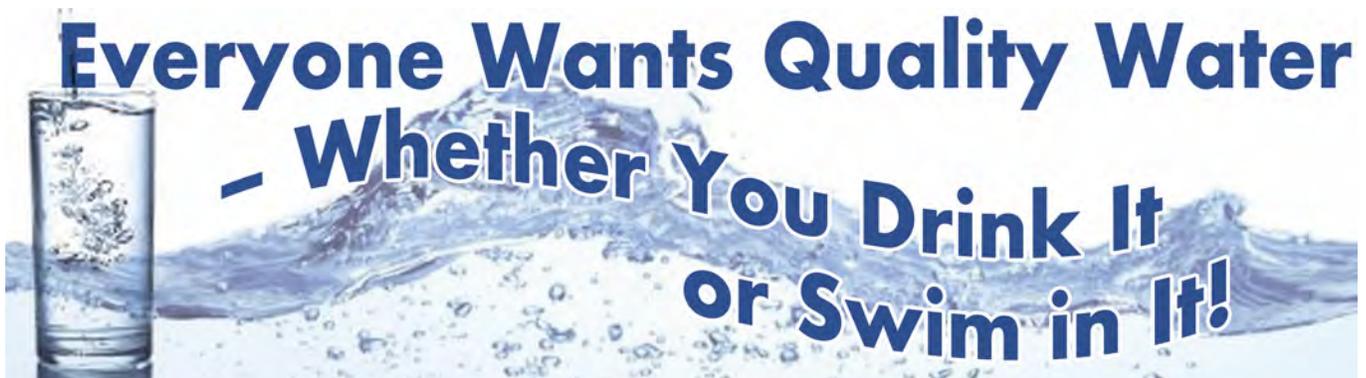


Everyone Wants Quality Water - Whether You Drink It or Swim in It!



This is my first article as a new wastewater tech at Kansas Rural Water Association. I want to use this article to introduce myself. I was born and raised in Chanute, Kansas. I attended Northern Illinois University (NIU) on a wrestling scholarship after winning a Kansas High School wrestling state title in 1993. After NIU, I moved to Denver, Colorado and began working for an environmental reclamation and erosion control company, Western States Reclamation, Inc. The primary focus of the company was keeping sediments out of the surface water. I worked in many states in the western part of the country from operating John Deere tractors in downtown Denver to reseeding pipelines in Utah, sometimes not seeing another human for days.

I then worked in Florida for a private environmental consulting firm. The primary focus of that company was groundwater monitoring and remediation. I also worked on a sink hole project, where I was the expert. However, in this case, “expert” meant the guy small enough to climb down in the hole and place Quikrete in the void. While in Florida, I also learned to watch for alligators in the swamps and any other critters, native or nonnative, that would like to eat me. Even though I’ve worked across the country and have had many experiences, there has always been an internal pull to get back to Kansas. Everyone always asks why I would move back to Kansas after living in other places. The answer is simple. I like the Kansas landscape and its people, and most importantly my family lives here.

To get back to Kansas, I first took a job ten years ago as the Confined

Animal Feeding Operation Inspector for Kansas Department of Health and Environment (KDHE) out of the Lawrence District office. It was there where I met Jeff Lamfers, a water inspector working out of the same office. Jeff was anticipating to retire from his position and soon after his retirement and employment by KRWA, I applied for and was assigned his vacated position as a water inspector. After 8 years at Lawrence, I relocated to the KDHE office in Chanute where I was Environmental Program Administrator and more recently, District Environmental Administrator.

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During my ten-year career at KDHE, I had different titles and held multiple positions, but one constant was that it was always related to water. Water runoff, water for consumption, water treatment, wastewater treatment, water, water, water...

As a regulator of water, in whatever aspect it may have been, I have seen ingenuity by operators at facilities that has simply amazed me. Although sometimes the results of such ingenuity may not have been legal, or constructed

according to the regulation, it usually worked. Kansas water and wastewater operators are simply not given enough credit for the jobs they do, usually with limited resources. Most readers of this magazine are from the regulated community, meaning you are involved in some way in utility operations, management, governance, or consulting. The regulators that come see you at the most inopportune times don’t get enough credit for the jobs they do, either. At most facilities, a regulator automatically has a strike against himself or herself because the regulator works for the government. Additionally, a regulator is at your facility attempting to interpret regulations that may be very complex and written for all facilities across the entire country. Neither job is easy. Prior to leaving KDHE and being hired by KRWA I told my colleagues and future colleagues that my goal was to make the water in Kansas better, no matter who I work for. I have been hired as a wastewater technician at KRWA and although that will be my primary job duty, I feel equally versed in the drinking water side and am willing to provide assistance in any way I can to improve the water of Kansas for Kansans.

Every one of us in the water industry has a different role, but hopefully the same goal: Quality water, whether you drink it or swim in it.

Jason Solomon works primarily as a wastewater tech at KRWA. He previously was District Administrator at the Kansas Department of Health and Environment southeast Kansas office in Chanute.

