



## Apprenticeship Program Being Developed by KRWA

**K**ansas Rural Water Association is developing an Apprenticeship Program for the water and wastewater workforce. It's a program in which workers train on-the-job – earning wages and doing productive work – while simultaneously taking courses. When someone completes an apprenticeship, they'll have valuable work experience and a recognized industry credential. Apprentices, who must be at least 18 years of age, work full-time at a local water or wastewater system and must be paid at least minimum wage. As the apprentice advances through the program, his/her wages increase according to a predetermined schedule agreed upon between employer and apprentice.

KRWA has conducted surveys of wages and also expressions of interest. From that, an Apprenticeship Development Committee was established. KRWA staff member Monica Wurtz has been heading up the development. Committee members are identified in the accompanying photo. The members met on December 13, 2019 in Salina and on January 9, 2020 in Lyons. The committee has been tasked with the following:

- Creating the "Standards of Apprenticeship" for water and wastewater operators in Kansas
- Identifying minimum qualifications for entrance into the program
- Creating "Periods of Apprenticeship" in which the apprentice must complete specific advancement requirements in order to receive a wage increase
- Identifying on-the-job skills to be obtained
- Developing a training curriculum
- Developing a policy for handling apprentices with unsatisfactory progress

The goal of the KRWA apprenticeship program is to change the public's perception of the water and wastewater workforce and increase operator wages by implementing higher quality, systematic training and by educating the public of the industry opportunities through recruitment efforts. The program will consist of a two-year, time-based program in which the

apprentice will complete 4,000 hours of on-the-job training combined with 288 hours of related theoretical instruction (course work). The apprentice will earn incremental wage increases as skills are gained. Wages will be paid, and agreed upon in advance, by the hiring water or wastewater utility. Every graduate of the program will receive a completion certificate from the U.S. Department of Labor, which is a nationally-recognized credential. KRWA has set a goal of enlisting three apprentices by September 30, 2020.

KRWA is also initiating a Pre-Apprenticeship/Youth Outreach program in conjunction with the Apprenticeship program as a way for KRWA to get the message out to our youth of what our industry does and how they can be a part of it. Greg Metz and Monica Wurtz will be initiating an outreach program with Kansas high schools, career fairs, etc. to promote careers in the water and wastewater industry.



**The Apprenticeship Development Committee established by KRWA gathered for this photo at a recent committee meeting. Members are: Front L to R: Chad Buckley, City Administrator, City of Lyons; Matt Meeks, Senior Water & Wastewater Operator, City of Maize; Monica Wurtz, KRWA Apprenticeship Program Coordinator. Back L to R: Ron Blanton, Utility Supervisor, City of Lyons; Scott Robertson, Utility Superintendent, City of Hesston; Brian Bowles, Public Works Superintendent, City of Minneapolis; and, Greg Metz, KRWA Circuit Rider.**

