

Spotlight on Apprenticeship

Name of Apprentice: James Howard

System: City of Garnett, Water Treatment Plant

Apprenticeship Track: Water Operations Specialist

Apprenticeship Start Date: March 4, 2021



James Howard is the Superintendent of Water Treatment of Garnett, Kan. James began with the KRWA Apprenticeship Program on March 4, 2021.

KRWA: How long have you worked for the city of Garnett? Any previous experience?

Howard: I started my career with the City of Garnett in the Power Plant back in November of 2017. The power plant provides backup power for the water plant and we would operate at night and on weekends as power/water plant operators. Over time my interests in water grew and my career evolved down the path it has.

KRWA: What are your main responsibilities at the treatment plant?

Howard: I am now the Superintendent of the Water Treatment Plant. My responsibilities are very simple: produce safe, potable water for my community. I cannot do this without my staff and most of my work is achieved with their support. This work involves, but is not limited to, covering down for operators, scheduling maintenance for pumps, motors and lift stations, constant water quality investigations, keeping our chemicals and lab supplied year-round, etc.

KRWA: What is your favorite part about being a water plant operator?

Howard: Hands down it must be the technology. I run a water plant that still operates using technology from the '60s. We do so much here by actual manpower. For example, when we drain sludge from our basins an operator has to open the valve and watch the sludge drain. Whereas, other plants have the technology to automate this process. That kind of information excites me.

KRWA: What is the most challenging part about being a water plant operator?

Howard: Money. Our equipment is not cheap and usually the funding comes from tax dollars. So, when I, as an operator, see an obvious problem or need, I can't always get it because of how a committee needs a vote. This is a great check and balance on paper but not always good for operations.

KRWA: What made you interested in KRWA's Apprenticeship Program?

Howard: Education is what I wanted and KRWA brought it. I studied whatever I could get my hands on before taking the Class III test and still failed. KRWA's program put everything I needed in front of me. Since being a part of this program, I have achieved my Class IV and will be working on my wastewater soon.

KRWA: What do you hope to achieve by participating in the program?

Howard: I wanted to achieve Class IV operator certification, which I have already done. I'm really hoping to speed through the rest of the program and start on the wastewater side as well.

KRWA: Would you recommend the program to anyone that might be considering it (either already employed by a utility or not)? Why?

Howard: Yes. I cannot put a price on what I have learned in this program. It's easy to do, no time constraints, and has led me to my position as a leader and increased my salary.

Monica Wurtz began work with KRWA in October 2013. She previously worked at the Kansas Department of Health and Environment and also worked at US EPA Region 7 for four years. Monica is considered a national expert on various drinking water regulations.





KRWA Staff Member Greg Metz explains some of the components in the Apprenticeship Training Trailer.

WATER AND WASTEWATER OPERATORS ARE ESSENTIAL TO EVERY COMMUNITY, CREATING A STABLE JOB OPPORTUNITY FOR LONG-TERM CAREERS.



Learn and Earn!
Kansas Rural Water Association
**APPRENTICESHIP
PROGRAM**

The KRWA Registered Apprenticeship Program is recognized by the Kansas Department of Labor and with other state associations through National Rural Water Association, under the U.S. Department of Labor. The Apprenticeship Program is designed to help train the next generation of skilled workers and provide standardized training across the nation in Drinking Water and Wastewater professionals' occupations. Apprentices will earn-while-they-learn in a structured two-year training program that combines on-the-job training with related technical instruction. Apprentices work with knowledgeable and passionate people who ensure that Americans can continue relying on safe drinking water and vital wastewater services that protect public health and the environment.

Water and wastewater workers provide an invaluable service – day in and day out. Their work is essential to protecting public health and the environment. See the next page for more information about the KRWA Apprenticeship Program. To apply, contact KRWA Apprenticeship Coordinator Monica Wurtz.

Program Overview

Over the next decade, the water sector is expected to lose between 30 and 50 percent of the workforce to retirement. To combat disproportionate retirement, KRWA has partnered with the National Rural Water Association to develop an Apprenticeship Program that will offer two new career paths – Water System Operation Specialist and Wastewater System Operation Specialist.

Minimum Requirements for Apprentices:

1. At least 18 years of age
2. High school diploma, GED or equivalent
3. Physically capable of performing essential functions
4. Take and pass drug screen
5. Pass a background check
6. Valid state issued driver's license



The mission of the Kansas Rural Water Association is:

Provide education and leadership necessary to enhance the effectiveness of Kansas' water and wastewater utilities.

Benefit for Apprentices

Water and Wastewater System Operators help provide safe drinking water to millions of Kansans and protect our natural waterways. Operators are a vital part of our communities. Without properly trained personnel in these roles communities can suffer. During their training, apprentices will work alongside professional operators, learn skills that can be taken anywhere, and earn a wage while they learn.

Participating Apprentices will be required to:

- Meet the Minimum Requirements for apprentices
- Register as an Apprentice with KRWA
- Be employed or be willing to become employed by a Participating Member System
- Complete the 2-year program:
 - 4,000 on-the-job training hours
 - 288 related instruction hours (classroom hours)

Benefit for Systems

Many Water and Wastewater Operators in Kansas have worked at the same utility for most of their career. With retirement, they will depart with decades of valuable institutional knowledge. These training programs will offer member systems a way to pass down and retain critical skills and knowledge of their water and wastewater systems to the next generation of industry workers.

Participating Systems will be expected to:

- Identify and support an experienced mentor to provide guidance and on-site training to apprentices
- Pay the apprentice's wages
- Take advantage of Program Coordinator to resolve concerns and ensure best outcome for apprentice
- Strongly consider retaining apprentices following program completion

If you are interested in registering as an Apprentice or becoming a Participating Member System contact KRWA Apprenticeship Program Coordinator:

Monica Wurtz, KRWA Technical Assistant
email: monica@krwa.net
cell: 785-262-7301