

# The Evolution and History of KRWA Training Programs

In the early 1970s, I volunteered to be involved in organizing and developing a large rural water district in northeast Kansas. Eight other local guys and I held “community sign-up” meetings every month. We did our best to describe how we saw the new rural water district as a long-term benefit to the area. Two towns joined the district. After only several months, the proposed project had more than 500 rural signers. So, now what? It was time to locate a water supply. That story can wait for another day.

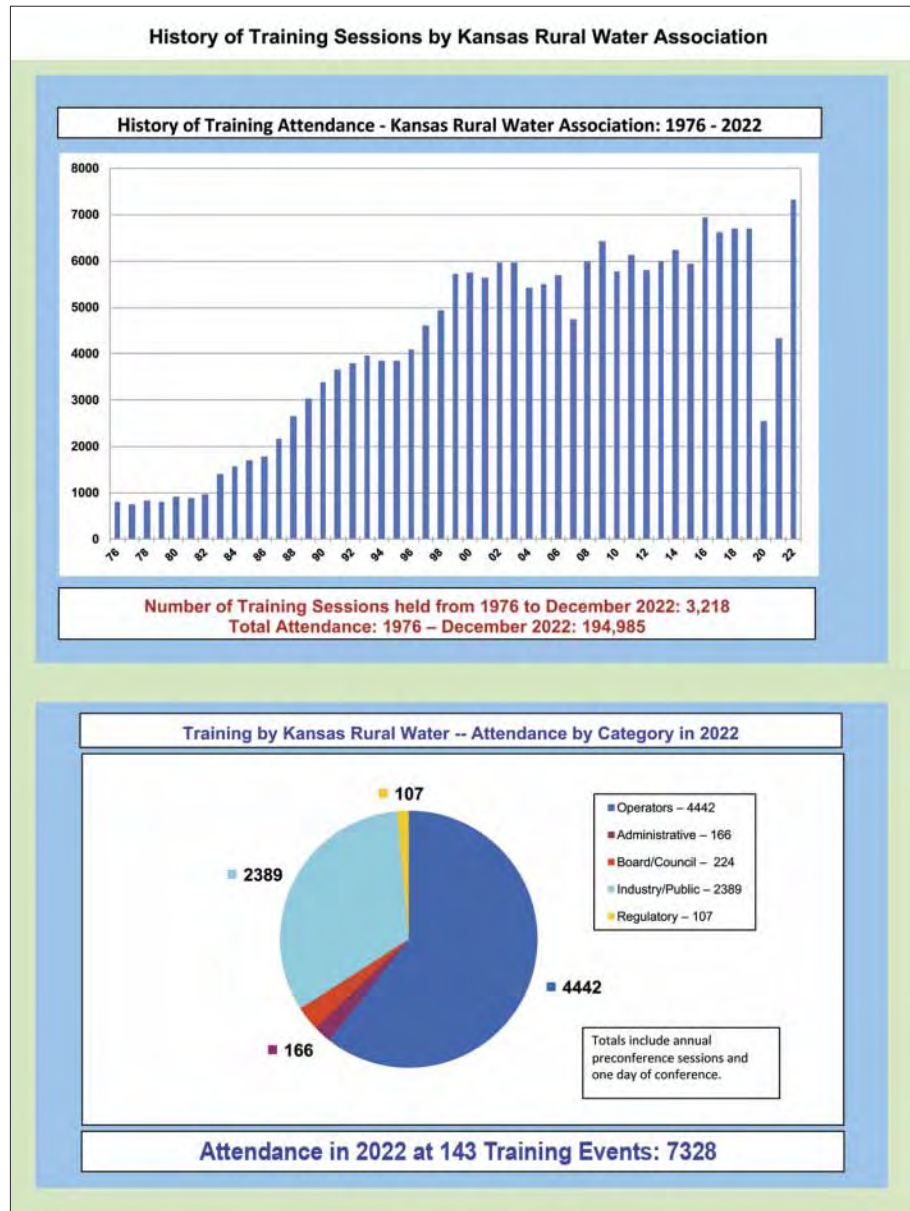
The frustration that I and other steering committee and board members had was that, aside from the advice of the project consultant, we were pretty much left alone to find answers to questions. It was a steep learning curve. Hindsight being what it is, we made some mistakes. Most of those were because of inadequate funding which resulted in some pipelines having to be smaller than were proposed by the engineer. Our project was being reviewed at the time when OPEC became organized. In short order, the cost of pipe resin doubled. What seemed already to be a tight budget, the increase in material costs compounded the situation. To top that off, the Nixon Administration tied up the Farmers Home administration's federal funding. Thanks to the persistence by many people at various levels, the project was eventually funded. Those who signed their user agreement were elated to have a water supply other than to rely on their three to ten-gpm domestic wells, many of which produced water of questionable quality.

Today’s RWD board and city council members, operators and others benefit from decades of the National Rural Water Association and KRWA’s efforts to lobby for adequate funding for both

water and wastewater projects that serve smaller towns and rural water districts.

When computers were first introduced, in the mid-80s, many people believed that the computer was just another Atari 2600 with Pac-man gamebox. In many cases, small-town city councils and RWD boards were

not about to purchase a “plaything” for their office staff. But as advances in computer technology were made – and software became a retail-stocked item, the Pac-man syndrome wavered. KRWA also embarked on a training program. KRWA rented computer labs at various community colleges and also at Baker University to introduce the PC



## Summary of KRWA Training Programs in 2022

- 141 Full-day training sessions attended by 2,776 people with 1,929 operators
- 17 Online sessions attended by 706 people with 627 operators.
- Total attendance at the 9 preconference training sessions at the Annual Conference: 1,847 with 868 operators.
- Attendance at Annual Conference, days two and three: 1,632 with 829 operators.

### How is training funded at KRWA?

- KRWA had a contract with KDHE to provide 14 water system training sessions annually. Under that program, KRWA conducted 7 sessions; the contract was \$17,325.00. The contract was not renewed after June 30, 2022.
- KDHE wastewater program had contracted with KRWA to provide 14 sessions for smaller systems, namely lagoons. KRWA conducted 13 sessions with contract income of \$31,827.00
- KRWA's internal account funded 124 day-long sessions at a cost of \$298,363.21. Note: KRWA charges for the Cross Connection / Backflow Certification and also the Confined Space/Trench Safety sessions. Total income from those sessions was \$60,400. Both training programs are subsidized by KRWA. Subtracting income from fee-based training, the net charge to the KRWA internal account for training was \$237,963 in 2022.

to scores of small cities and RWDs. In other cases, Merle Windler of Thoroughbred Computer Systems in Topeka and I loaded up a van filled with desktop computers, heavy CRTs, and printers, and took that training on the road. Generally, these sessions were attended by 20 or so water system operators, managers and board or council members. It was a rewarding experience, despite hauling what at the time was equipment valued at \$50,000 or more. Attendees learned about 3.5-inch diskettes vs. the original 5.5-inch floppy. And yes, the “root directory” is on the “C” drive.

As technology kept changing for computers, so it also did for many other aspects of water system operations. The concept of reading water meters with some automated reading technologies was abstract. But that was no more so than many of the original signers to our new rural water district in 1972 had as many were not convinced water could be made to run uphill in a rural water district. In 2020 when Covid was raging across the country, KRWA evaluated various platforms to allow online training sessions. It has been beneficial that KDHE has now embraced online training.

The basic reason I and others have worked for decades at KRWA is to help others avoid making the mistakes that have already been made. Also water and wastewater systems need to have somewhere to go to learn about new methods and technologies. In 1976, the operator certification

program was introduced, and as Congress passed and EPA promulgated an array of regulations, “training” programs had also to adapt.

KRWA training sessions have been robust. KRWA has kept track of every training session held since April 1976. The sessions are posted on the KRWA website at <https://krwa.net/TRAINING/Training-History>.

KRWA was recently asked to summarize the training sessions provided by the Association in 2022 to several state agencies. It was good to report that 2022 marked the year in which the Association provided the highest number of sessions with the highest attendance ever. A chart showing the annual training attendance from 1976 to 2022 is displayed.

*Elmer Ronnebaum is KRWA General Manager; he has been employed by KRWA since 1983. He served seven years on the KRWA board of directors prior to that. He also helped develop a large RWD and served for fourteen years on a water district board of directors.*



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