

# Operators and Cooperators



**G**eorge Washington once said, “A hundred thousand men, coming one after another, cannot move a ton weight; but the united strength of 50 would transport it with ease.” While something like a front-end loader would make a far more efficient mover of tonnage in our time, the essence of Washington’s words has not lost its poignancy over the centuries. So effectively do such words encapsulate a universally understood truth that they need no

accompaniment or expounding upon. These days, however, such a philosophical truth is more commonly conveyed in the simplicity of the old English proverb that “many hands make light work”. Indeed, we can all appreciate the benefit of having an extra pair of diligent eyes or hard-working hands on just about any job site, though, as with all things, this is a single side of a many-faceted reality to consider.

In a world still reeling from the monumental production standstill it found itself in a few years ago, I don’t have to tell anyone reading this how difficult it can be to find many parts, fittings, materials, and devices lately – assuming you need it any sooner than six months or a year from now. While foundries and production facilities struggle to catch up on backed-up orders and field new ones, the simple fact is that if you don’t have a sizable inventory of spare parts, materials, and repair fittings, you’re not likely to see that want for resources change in anything resembling a hurry. Couple that with the historic drought we’ve seen across this state and many others, as well as the ground shift that accompanies such a factor, and the likelihood of needing to apply those resources to underground maintenance and repairs increases significantly.

Well, that was a happy intro. Now that we’re all sufficiently reminded of the doom and gloom surrounding the industry as of late, let’s talk about the question many of you have already gone to work on answering: “what can any of us do about it?” To start, I won’t presume to have all of the answers, here, but I



**We measure the world from many perspectives.  
We measure success from yours.**



**Specializing in Utility Data Collection & Inspection for Asset Management**

- Full-service GIS provider
- Survey-grade GPS & elevations
- Condition assessment
- Asset management
- Web-based & mobile GIS
- Custom workflow tools
- GIS Development
- Maintenance & support

**Erin Allen | Business Development Mngr. | erin.allen@sam.biz | 660.215.7091**



This photo shows a chlorine injector at Garden Plain that was broken due to freezing.

can share a little bit about what some systems and operators have done to get by in recent months and what some have done for many years or even decades, now. The common term is “mutual aid agreement”, but many will be familiar with the concept of maintaining good, working relationships with neighboring utility systems for purposes of sharing parts, equipment, and even personnel in times of need.

“It’s a gentlemen’s agreement,” said Robert Dick, Superintendent of Mount Hope’s maintenance department. “When you need it, it’s there, and everybody’s friendly

about it.” His system maintains standing mutual aid agreements with the cities of Burrton, Andale, and Haven, with Andale and Haven also holding to such an agreement between them. This multi-system agreement goes back some years, having only been solidified on paper in relatively recent years; this following legal council that it would protect all involved parties, should anyone be injured in the process of supplying aid to other members of the agreement. Essentially, what the agreement states is that any party can request the assistance of any other party in terms of parts, materials, heavy equipment, personnel, and other resources in times of need, pending approval granted by the director of the system receiving the request. In that way, the agreement maintains its voluntary nature, and each entity has potential access to a network of resources beyond its limited supply. Quite helpful in times of need, whether routine or emergency. As Robert would say, “It works out really well for all of us involved. It’s as simple as that.”

Now, I suspect many people reading this have found themselves in tough situations at some point in their careers with no way to reach their nearest parts distributor and request that one odd ball-sized fitting or specialized tool. I’ve been there, myself, and once or twice spent hours piecing together varying degrees of Eldritch abominations in hopes that one of them might get me through the night – only to find out in conversation with a fellow operator at the next training session that he had such a part collecting dust in his parts room. Much as has been the case with many of us in our personal lives, you might not always have much in the way of a working relationship with your neighbors – or

# REP

**R.E. Pedrotti Co., Inc.**  
*Instrumentation, Controls & Computer Systems*

CONTROL  
H<sub>2</sub>O  
SOLUTIONS

www.repedrotti.com  
SINCE 1976

SCADA  
SERVICE  
TELEMETRY  
INSTRUMENTATION  
SYSTEM INTEGRATION  
VARIABLE FREQUENCY DRIVES

Call REP for all your Instrumentation & Control needs.  
913-677-3366

any relationship at all, for that matter. Oftentimes (and especially in such cases), it can be quite difficult to walk over to a stranger and ask for help. Subscribing to a slightly different philosophy, following just such a recent emergency, the Utilities Superintendent for Garden Plain, Michael Martinez, had this to say: “I know it can be hard to ask for help. People tend to feel like they’re bugging somebody, but usually, if they do ask, they’ll be pleasantly surprised to find open arms.”

This particular emergency case for Michael was the result of a “perfect storm” of separate events, miles apart, that amassed into a 12-hour workday over what should have been his holiday off.

Several consecutive days of sub-zero temperatures had other notions, however, and Michael did what operators do when called to the occasion; he met it head-on. With multiple points of failure to address that day, Michael and I found ourselves at a brick wall, needing to replace a gas chlorine injector leg without a spare on hand. Unable to obtain one by standard means, in this case, we discovered that the nearby town of Bentley utilized identical injectors in its

**This particular emergency case for Michael was the result of a “perfect storm” of separate events, miles apart, that amassed into a 12-hour workday over what should have been his holiday off. Several consecutive days of sub-zero temperatures had other notions, however, and Michael did what operators do when called to the occasion; he met it head-on.**

disinfection process, and as chance would have it, I had met Bentley water operator Dan Bliss only a couple of months prior. After reaching out to Dan and explaining our situation, he eagerly offered to meet us halfway to deliver the part that ultimately brought Garden Plain’s water treatment system back up and running in time to avoid water quality concerns. Thinking to the future, with plans to expand Garden Plain’s network of interaction going forward, Michael said, “I think it would be beneficial for anyone out there to reach out and get to know the people in neighboring systems. I plan to take my guys and go around to meet the operators in the towns around us

very soon – just make a day of it.”

Speaking on a personal level, the events of that particular day have become a source of palpable inspiration to me as a KRWA professional. Not only do I feel my decision to join the Association was unequivocally the right call, given the assistance I was able to provide, but I managed to witness three significant facets of the utilities industry play out before my eyes: Michael’s grit and determination to see his

system’s water supply kept safe; Dan’s unhesitant willingness to assist another system in need; and, the undeniable utility of networking in an industry where it can be all too easy to feel alone. Far more often than not, I find operators to be the sort of people to whom these first two facets are intrinsic character traits. I hope that none of them fail to realize the power and utility of the third. In the end, our goals are all aligned to a singular end: providing safe, reliable, quality utilities and services to the public. In this, there is no room for compromise, and our goals are all the better met when we view and comport ourselves not only as operators but as cooperators, as well.

*Javon Baker began employment with KRWA in August 2022. He holds a Class IV water operator certification and has worked in the public water supply sector for ten years - most recently with the city of Valley Center, and previously for the cities of Goddard and Haysville.*






pec1.com






### Engineering Services for Municipalities

- Computer Hydraulic Models
- GIS & Planning
- Land Development
- Landscape Architecture
- Pumping Systems
- Rural Water Districts
- Sewer Collection Systems
- Streets & Drainage Design
- Treatment Facilities
- Water Supply, Storage, & Distribution

**Engineering Services:** Mechanical | Electrical | Structural | Civil  
**Field Services:** Inspection | Testing | Survey | Geotechnical

**Kansas Locations:** Wichita | Lawrence | Pittsburg | Topeka



**SERVICE** - Open Channel Flowmeters, Closed Pipe Flowmeters, Magnetic Flowmeters, Propeller Meters, Clamp-on Doppler  
 Transit-time Flowmeters, Thermal Mass Meters, Analytical Instrumentation, (pH, Dissolved Oxygen, Carbon Dioxide, Turbidity)  
 Real-Time Organic Measurement (BOD, COD, TOC, Nitrate, Coliforms, Chloride + more), Gas Analyzers, Level  
 Transmitters (Ultrasonic, Radar, Capacitance), Butterfly Valves, Ball Valves, Electric Valve Actuators, Pneumatic Valve  
 Actuators, Automated Valves, Fiber Optic Wet Well Floats, Basic Digital Displays – SERVICE

**Environmental Solutions That Last!**  
[www.gpmweb.net](http://www.gpmweb.net)

