

KRWA works to help others help themselves

Here at the Kansas Rural Water Association, there are certain questions that are as constant as the seasons. What do you really do? How many people work there? How do you know whom to help? Where does your money come from? As General Manager, and the longest serving employee, let me try to offer a few answers. But some history first.

Early federal-state partnership helped Kansas

Elmer Ronnebaum
General Manager



Kansas Rural Water Association (KRWA) was first organized in 1966. There's some debate whether or not KRWA was the first 'state' rural water association. We believe it was. KRWA was formed through the efforts of a handful of rural water activists. Encouragement came also from the Farmers Home Administration, now known as USDA Rural Development.

The goal? Help developing systems obtain funding. And what a success there was. The Kansas Legislature provided a \$1 million a year grant to rural water district development from 1974 to 1981 for a total of \$6,999,999.95 to be exact. Funding was often very small by current standards; the average loan per user was in the \$1,500 range. By 1973 that average loan per user was up to \$4000 plus.

In 1975, Congress passed the Safe Drinking Water Act. No longer would water be just wet and cool. It would now become consistently safe to drink, anywhere in America.

The pace of organizing quickened

In 1976, KRWA sent two members of its board, Mr. Carl Conger, Iola, and Mr. T. J. Dickerson, from Fort Scott, to Oklahoma City as delegates for another new idea - the consideration of the National

were more business meetings than training; attendance logs weren't kept.

More troops join the force

In 1980, NRWA secured funding to establish a Circuit Rider program. KRWA was up to two employees; a Circuit Rider visited hundreds of systems, engineering firms, and suppliers dealing with problems from gaskets falling out of PVC pipeline, water loss, rates and more. The work in those early days by KRWA staff

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Rural Water Association. Small systems (and state agencies for that matter) had to deal with new regulations and implementation issues for tens of thousands of public water systems. Small systems wanted and needed an advocate in their states and in Washington.

At Oklahoma City, seven states joined as charter members of NRWA. Within a year, Congress appropriated funds to help the NRWA provide training in states to better help systems maintain compliance with the requirements of the Safe Drinking Water Act. KRWA had a part time employee, whose wife was secretary. They organized training sessions and networked with state and federal agencies. From 1976 to 1980, KRWA facilitated 41 training sessions that were attended by 2579 people. Annual conferences

demonstrated the type of partnerships that today's systems rely on.

Key events over the next 24 years include:

- 1987 - KRWA endorses and nurtures the creation of the Kansas Rural Water Finance Authority (KRWFA) to ensure that borrowers have options under the FmHA's Discount Purchase Program.
- 1989 - First state contract is from Kansas Corporation Commission. KRWA starts water loss/leak detection and electrical energy audits.
- 1991 - Funding for water loss and leak detection program assumed by the Kansas Water Plan; program administered for the next 2 years by KDHE.
- 1996 - NRWA extended a contract for KRWA to provide services to wastewater systems.

■ 1997 - NRWA extended a contract for KRWA to provide assistance to systems with development of groundwater and wellhead protection plans.

■ 1997 - KRWA and its sister organization, the KRWFA entered into agreement for the Finance Authority to provide financial advisory services to the new Kansas Public Water Supply Loan Fund.

■ 1998 - KDHE contracted KRWA to provide technical assistance to small systems through the set-aside under the new revolving loan fund.

■ 2001 - NRWA extended a contract for an additional Circuit Rider.

■ 2001 - The Kansas Dept. of Commerce asked KRWA to consider providing inspection services and assistance on KDOC's new self-help program tagged "KAN STEP." A 5-year contract was signed; numerous projects have been successfully completed since including water systems and community buildings and fire stations.

Today, it's the only such program in the nation that's putting up buildings.

■ 2002 - Kansas Corporation Commission asked KRWA to take the lead in learning about new technology to help local systems improve their mapping resources. To say the least, we are still learning as technology changes rapidly --and we've learned it had to be simplified.

■ 2003 - KDHE awarded a contract to KRWA to develop the board/council training program, KanCap. This program will be unveiled at the 2004 Annual Conference.

■ 2004 - KDHE nears announcement of award of multi-year contract to KRWA to provide on-site training and assistance to new operators.

In between all these contracts and programs, KRWA has embarked on numerous initiatives on its own, making the necessary investment to provide needs of systems and to fill the mission of the

Association in helping systems. The highly successful and nationally recognized *Water Board Bible* series was written well before the new buzzwords, "Capacity Development" were coined. You see, KRWA's approach has always been that everything impacts "compliance" and while some regulators only wanted to focus on compliance, if the system didn't have good management or financial backing, then lack of compliance was unavoidable. So, why not produce some handbooks on the various aspects? KRWA did and they continue to sell. The most recent order was for 1500 *Water Board Bibles* that are going to Washington state. All of this too begs some mention of the variety of legislative efforts that KRWA has been involved with from the funding for the State Water Plan to sales tax exemptions, and reduction of regulatory issues at the national level, needless to mention the continued efforts by KRWA to help ensure that funding and programs are available to help small systems.



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-- "IF WE SUPPLY IT, WE MAKE IT WORK!" --

The inaugural issue of this magazine was in July 1976. An 8 1/2 x 11 sheet of paper, it began: "Rural water districts and small towns are no longer in charge of their own future." That was in reference to the new drinking water regulations that seemed to be coming left and right. Since, *The Lifeline* has grown and continues to mature to be more of the more respected state rural water association publications nationally.

Questions and answers

History provides perspective. But busy water professionals need to know where to go for help.

Q:What does KRWA do?

Answer: Provides a huge variety of water and wastewater services for cities and rural water districts such as:

- On-site help ranging from working with your board/council to helping fix leaks.

- Training at many locations around the state and at the annual KRWA conference.

- Provided practical information via publications (*The Kansas Lifeline*, *The Clarifier*) and the website www.krwa.net

- Legislative action in Topeka and Washington, working to get the best laws and regs for public water supply systems.

Q:How many staff are there?

Answer: 16 dedicated individuals. Yes, there have been changes in staff; some find other jobs in the industry. In a few cases, personnel have been dismissed from employment because of not following the Association's policies.

What's best about the dedication of KRWA staff? First, many will tell you that their job "is not just a job." They willingly put in as many hours at it takes to get the job done. Instead of saying, "I don't have time to do that," they ask, "How can we work to get that done?" No one at KRWA only "operates a contract or program." KRWA

does not operate programs! KRWA uses programs as the vehicle to provide services to cities and rural water systems, working in partnership with hundreds of industry representatives, legislators, agencies and individuals to help others help themselves.

Q:How are KRWA's activities financed?

Answer: From a mix of state contracts (such as KDHE, Kansas Water Office and KDOC), federal contracts (such as National Rural Water), sales of publications (such as the *Water Board Bible* series), and membership dues. Those are the mainstays.

Q:How does KRWA know whom to help?

Answer: Usually because utilities call, phone or email us for assistance. In other situations, it's due to state agencies alerting us that a city or RWD has a chronic problem. There are referrals from legislators, local organizations and numerous requests from individuals.

Q:How can I contact KRWA?

Answer: Many ways. The phone is 785-336-3760; the fax is 785-336-2751. Send emails to krwa@nvcs.com. And check out our website at www.krwa.net. It receives hundreds of hits per day.

The bottom line

KRWA brings 37 years of experience to your door-step. We help Kansas' PWSs achieve the managerial, financial and technical capacity needed to deliver affordable, quality water to the last household tap. Need assistance? Just give KRWA a call or send that email. The 16 dedicated staff do whatever it takes to help YOUR Association – not "our's" – get your job done right – and quick.



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