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## ARTICLES

Video Inspection Services .....	4
IRWA Rate Study and Your Role.....by Don L. Craig	5, 9
Water Service Line Insurance –	
Do Your Customers Need it? .....by Wayne Nelson	6
Spring Is Here.....by Wayne Dixon	8
Let's Talk About Chocolate Cake .....by John Bell	13
29th Annual Technical Conference Photos .....	14
And The Winner Is .....	15
H <sub>2</sub> O Xpo .....	16
WORD SEARCH: Spring Is In the Air .....	19
Welcome New Members .....	20
Take Back Unwanted Prescription Drugs .....	21
What's In It For Me? .....	22
IRWA 8th Annual Golf Outing .....	23
Tentative Water Training Schedule .....	24
GPS/GIS Mapping Services .....	24
Toying Around With	
Customer Service .....by Charles Marshall	26

## MISSION STATEMENT

“Protecting and preserving the water and wastewater resources of Rural Illinois through education, representation and on-site technical assistance”.

**ON THE COVER** *Pictured are Mike Patridge and Deanna Young representing Mt. Pulaski with Professor Faucet. The City of Mt. Pulaski took home the Best Tasting Water Award at the 29th Annual IRWA Conference held in Effingham, Illinois.*

Water Ways is the official publication of the Illinois Rural Water Association, P.O. Box 49, Taylorville, Illinois 62568, and is published quarterly for distribution to members as well as other industry associations and friends. Our website is [www.ilrwa.org](http://www.ilrwa.org). Articles and photographs are encouraged. Advertising and submissions should be mailed to the above address or e-mail us at [ilrwadb@ilrwa.org](mailto:ilrwadb@ilrwa.org).

## LIST OF ADVERTISERS

Cady Aquastore .....	27
Caldwell Tanks .....	12
Coe Equipment, Inc. ....	4
Crawford, Murphy & Tilly, Inc. ....	11
Curry & Associates Engineers, Inc. ....	13
Dixon Engineering .....	25
Heneghan & Associates, P.C.....	17
Layne-Western.....	12
Lemna Technologies, Inc.....	4
Maguire Iron.....	5
Metropolitan Industries.....	7
Mexus Industrial .....	18
Municipal Well & Pump .....	18
Natgun Corporation .....	11
Newell Sand/Rock Filter Cleaning ....	4
Norman Noe Co. Inc. ....	11
PDC Laboratories, Inc. ....	17
Pittsburg Tank & Tower.....	26
Red Valve Company .....	13
Ressler & Associates.....	10
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Taylor Coating Sales, Inc.....	21
Test, Inc. ....	8
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USA Bluebook.....	28
Utility Service Company, Inc.....	8
Water Solutions Unlimited, Inc.....	20
Water Well Solutions.....	12





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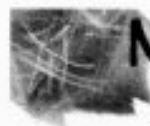
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## IRWA Rate Study and Your Role

by Don L. Craig, Deputy Director

The present IRWA Rate Study program, was developed by myself clear back around 1990 while I was working for the National Rural Water Association as a regional field representative in the Asset Management Program. At that time, I designed, formatted, and programmed the study on the then used DOS database program called Q&A by Symantec. Many state affiliate association staff picked up on the program, as did IRWA, and began to use it in their field work assisting rural systems. Other states, developed and used their own programs as well. As the years progressed, and computers improved, so did the Windows based programs. Eventually,

all the state rural water associations, as well as the National Rural Water Association, started using Microsoft Office to a larger degree. As such, and since computers were moving away from DOS based programming on to Windows. And, the main database program being used in Office, was Access.

So, as time allowed, I eventually learned how to create and program Access, to develop a usable new rate study program within that software. Basically the concept was the same, as were the calculations needed to reach the proper determinations based on statistical and financial information from the sys-



tem personnel. That's a little background on how our rate study program came about. It is still being used by many of the other state associations as well.

Now, let's move into the real purpose of the program. First and foremost, this

*continued on page 9*

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## *Water Service Line Insurance— Do Your Customers Need It?*

*by Wayne Nelson, IRWA Training Specialist*

In this month's article I want to discuss water service line insurance. The customers of many public water systems in Illinois have received notices in the mail offering this type of insurance. I recently received a call from the board chairman of one of our member systems informing me of the information that many of his customers have received in the mail. One of his customers related to him that she was very worried about receiving this notice. At my request he forwarded this literature to me for review. While what these companies are doing is legal, I want to let water department personnel know what some of their customers are receiving and that their customers may have questions.

While the literature states in several places that this insurance is a voluntary program, it also may appear to some as something that is a requirement.

After the first notice was ignored by this customer, she received a second notice along with an application to obtain this insurance. This application included space for the customer's credit card information. This second notice is what caused great concern to the customer.

Following are two axioms about insurance: One: "fear of the future sells insurance". None of us knows what tomorrow will bring. Two: "insurance is only worth it if you end up needing it". I have flown quite a few miles but have never purchased flight insurance. I have

purchased several big-ticket items in my life and bought an extended warranty policy on a pickup truck (now with 278,000 miles on it) and never collected a dime. I'm a firm believer in "need vs. risk". Now if I'm ever in a plane that crashes on my old Ford, you guys get the last laugh and a cold one on me (contact my widow).

Here's my take on extended warranties: The seller is basically saying you need to buy extra coverage because the item he's selling you isn't really that good. I purchased a portable 8" TV (with AC and battery back up) from a major chain that was going out of business. The TV cost me \$24.95. The clerk then asked if I wanted to purchase extended warranty coverage on my \$25 TV.

So back to water line insurance: If a customer has an old galvanized water line maybe this might be a good policy to have. If a customer has a copper or a 200 psi plastic water line maybe the risk of leakage would be less. And if a policy contains more exclusions and holes than a water line could possibly have, it may not be worth the paper it's written on. The exclusions could be such as "normal wear and tear", thawing of lines, and, of course, the always convenient "Acts of God".

While speaking with the board chairman, he told me that his system is relatively new and no major problems with service line failure have been evident. He



also gave his concerned customer the same information.

The chairman and I agreed that while the final decision to purchase this type of insurance is ultimately the choice of the consumer, it is our responsibility to point out that it is not required by your water supply or by any regulatory agency, including the USEPA, IEPA, Illinois Plumbing Code, or local government entities.

If you have already had questions or feel you may receive questions from your customers about water service line insurance, you may want to post a notice in your billing office or municipal building directing them to contact water department personnel for information. **Advise them to read and understand the policy including the fine print and exclusions.** Help your customers make an informed decision.

Such a notice is available on our website at [www.ilrwa.org](http://www.ilrwa.org), under Downloads. This notice is in Word document so that you can easily make any changes you feel are necessary.



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Finally spring is here! Winter is almost over, so we can finally put away the plows and carharts. No more up all night checking the snow accumulations, no more frozen meters and pipes. No more working in the shop, it's time to get out and enjoy the nice weather. Or is it?

Last week the weather was so nice, I like many others couldn't wait to get outside and do some work. A good day to patch those potholes, and that we did. It was so nice that when I got home that evening yard work actually sounded like a good idea. The next morning when I started to get out of bed I noticed a few aching muscles that I haven't used all winter. Thankfully it was raining that day, so I thought it would be a good time to rest those muscles and start making a summer "To Do" list. I found last years list and started marking off what had been done. I realized very quickly there were a lot of items that didn't get done and by the time I finished adding to the list I needed a second page. Looks like another busy summer and I wondered how we will ever get all this done in such a short time. I'm pretty sure nobody ever gets



their "To Do List" completed, so don't stress yourself too much. My advice to everyone in this situation is try to remember to relax, enjoy your summer, your family, do the best you can and be safe. Your "To Do List" will always be there and your summers will always be busy. Maybe winter isn't so bad after all.




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is a 'basic' rate study, that should be completed probably every year, but definitely every two years. The idea behind it all, and what I wanted for small rural systems, was a way to find out and see 'where they stand' in relation to their debt service load (if any) and operational costs being incurred when using a set unit (1000 gallons) of the commodity they provided or the service they rendered...respectively potable water distribution and wastewater collection.

I'm not going to go into depth in regard to determinations made by the study, but more into the importance of understanding the overall picture rendered by its use. I have been telling our staff to reiterate the fact to system personnel, that conclusions determined by the program, and recommendations from those, are SOLELY based on the financial and statistical data being provided to them from the system. Without proper, concise, up to date, and factual data; the ability to develop proper rate calculations, is hindered to say the least. Also, trying to complete a rate study, while enduring a high water loss in the system, is like having a canoe without a paddle.... it's useless. So please, get a handle on system water loss, before trying to pass any kind of rate increase on to your customers. Not doing so, is basically not fair.... plain and simple.

Also, it's imperative that every system's personnel, as well as their customers, understand that determinations

derived from proper data, are only relayed back to the system as recommendations... not mandates. On every input data sheet of the IRWA Rate Study, used to acquire the data needed to come up with recommendations; there is a "disclaimer" which clearly defines what the study's intent is, and explains where IRWA stands in relation to helping complete the study. Moreover, the bottom line is, the responsibility to react to, implement, or not move forward with any recommendations from the study, is the sole responsibility of the governing Board of the system the study has been completed for. Our staff, cannot and will not get in the middle of taking action to go forward with a rate increase, or not. They are there to just furnish the tools the system personnel need, to make that tough decision, if warranted.

The following italicized text in quotations, is taken directly from the input page of the IRWA Rate Study:

*\*\*\*\* The purpose of this rate study form is to derive the needed amounts for "User's Fee's" or "Minimum Charge", and the set rate charge above either of those. It's intent is to ONLY MEET THE MINIMUM FINANCIAL OBLIGATIONS OF THE UTILITY. This study only determines rates based on each 1000 gallons used, and is reflective of a constant flat rate charge per each unit used by the customers. This is a "basic" rate study, and it's determinations are the direct result of statistical and financial infor-*

*mation supplied by the facility personnel. And recommendations given to the utility as a result of this study, are only that.....\*\*\*\*"*

And also, I have recently instructed our field staff to also use this following language within a letter of recommendation back to the system based on the study's determinations.

*"It should be understood, that completion of this rate study is only reflective of the concise and proper data supplied to IRWA. And, that the results of a study are strictly a recommendation, and not a requirement for the utility to enforce. Proper determination and warranting to enact any rate increase is the sole responsibility of the governing board; as are any repercussions that may or may not follow in doing so. IRWA's recommendations, are only that."*

IRWA through it's staff, is here to help and advise to the best of our ability, when it comes to assisting small rural water and wastewater systems in Illinois. But, the tough and prudent decisions, when it comes to adjusting rates or any matter concerning the utility, rest with those men or women designated to do so. Because, they must not only make decisions for the best interest of the facility at present, but also for it's future. And, if they are not willing to do so, then it may be in the best interest of the utility, that they step aside and let someone on the Board who will.



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## Let's Talk About Chocolate Cake

by John Bell, Wastewater Technician



I like chocolate cake. I am certain that a great deal of us do like chocolate cake, cake of all kinds, and most pies. I tolerate broccoli and I really dislike....Well, I don't really need to go any farther into that subject. My point is that when it comes to something we really like, chocolate cake for example, it is not hard to think, talk and dream about it. When it comes to broccoli, most of us don't mind if the subject is quickly changed.

Funny thing happened over a year ago, wastewater operators wanted to know more about broccoli. Hold on now, it's true. I don't mean they really wanted to know about broccoli, but a subject most wastewater operators would consider just as distasteful as broccoli – **BUDGETS!!!**

I'll give you a second to spit out the broccoli (budgets). But, before you try to rid your mind of the bad taste, stop and think about other wastewater operators who have seen a need to eat their veggies.

YUCK!!! I don't care if Mom did say that stuff was good for me, I'm "not goanna eat it" no matter what. I know how you feel, but how does that explain why some wastewater operators are wanting to know more about budgets.

The answer is wrapped in a basic fact: Wastewater operators take pride in their Department and want to do what is needed (eat broccoli) to make it a winner.

The *TIMES* call for us to grasp that our department needs us to do what is necessary to keep it financially solvent. If you are not the one putting the budget together, then know what is trying to be accomplished through the budget. Operators have asked me to dedicate more training to budgeting because they see a need for their municipality. The next step (peas and carrots) is to coordinate rates and budgets so that the owners of your department get a clear picture

of what is needed to operate the system to everyone's satisfaction. I know we all like cake, but your fellow wastewater operators are showing it's necessary to "eat their veggies" in order to have a healthy department. IRWA will help in any way that we can, including training about budgets — oh!! Yuck!! What are we having for dessert?



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# 29th Annual Technical Conference - Effingham, Illinois





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## Take Back Unwanted Prescription Drugs

The U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) are providing an opportunity for you to help prevent pill abuse and theft by ridding your home of potentially dangerous expired, unused, and unwanted prescription drugs. On April 30th, 2011 from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m., you can bring your medications for disposal to several sites in Illinois. The service is free and anonymous, no questions asked.

Medicines are produced and prescribed in increasing volumes every year. But, unwanted or expired medicines in home cabinets are highly susceptible to diversion, misuse, and abuse. Rates of prescription drug abuse in the U.S. are alarmingly high, as are the numbers of accidental poisonings and overdoses due to these drugs. Studies show that a majority of abused prescription drugs are

obtained from family and friends, including from the home medicine cabinet.

The familiar methods for disposing of unused medicines—flushing them down the toilet or throwing them in the trash—pose potential safety, health and environmental hazards. Pharmaceuticals thrown in the trash can leach into groundwater, while those that are flushed can kill bacteria that break down waste in sewage plants, damage septic systems, and contaminate nearby waterways and harm aquatic wildlife.

Recent studies have identified a wide range of pharmaceutical chemicals in rivers, streams, groundwater, and drinking water nationwide. It has also been shown that some of these compounds are potentially harmful to fish and other aquatic organisms, affecting reproduction

and development even at very low concentrations. The long-term impacts of medicine disposal on human health and the health of the environment are not fully known.

This upcoming nationwide collection day comes on the heels of the DEA's first event last September, in which 242,000 pounds—121 tons—of prescription drugs were turned in to nearly 4,100 sites operated by the agency and more than 3,000 state and local law enforcement partners.

Medicines collected will be properly incinerated. Controlled, non-controlled, and over-the-counter medications will be collected. Liquid products and creams in their original containers will be accepted. Sharps will not be collected. To find a local collection site go to [www.DEA.gov](http://www.DEA.gov).



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# WHAT'S IN IT FOR ME?

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- ◆ Mailing of "IRWA Water Ways" quarterly magazine
- ◆ Member prices for IRWA conferences and other fee based training
- ◆ Annual mailing of Industry Contact Book
- ◆ A voice at the State and Federal levels of



## **VOTING & SUPPORTING MEMBERS RECEIVE:**

- ◆ Mailings of all upcoming training sessions in your area
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- ◆ Discount for members only given on IRWA's conferences
- ◆ The chance to offer IRWA's members a special discount to promote your product
- ◆ The opportunity to submit abstract for review for possible presentation at training sessions or conferences



## **S.O.U.P. MEMBERS RECEIVE:**

- ◆ We will keep a database of all IRWA training sessions you have received throughout the year. A printout of IRWA CEU's will be mailed out to you on an annual basis
- ◆ Job referral mailing with a listing of jobs open in the water & wastewater industry from our voting members
- ◆ 10 % discount on all items in the IRWA store for S.O.U.P. members whose system is a Voting member



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**JUNE 9, 2011**  
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**JULY 21, 2011**  
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## Toying around with Customer Service

by Charles Marshal  
Humorous Motivational Speaker

Have you ever noticed that some people seem to enjoy saying “no,” even when doing so is to their own detriment?

My little 6-year-old boy had wanted a toy gun for a while so we finally made the trip over to the toy store. As you know, I don’t use my position as a public figure to bad-mouth companies that have given me poor customer service, so let’s just say the name of the national toy store that I’m referring to is We“B”Toys.

After I wandered around We“B”Toys for five or ten minutes not finding what I wanted, I finally walked up to a customer service sales associate and asked, “Could you please tell me where you keep your toy guns?”

“Oh, we don’t carry toy guns,” the sales associate sniffed. “It is We‘B’Toys’ policy to not sell any guns.”

Wow. I came in to buy my son a toy and now it feels like I’m being sermonized by a sales associate with a cause, not to mention an attitude.

“Oh, okay,” I said, somewhat taken aback. I walked to the end of the aisle and saw a display of Nerf guns.

That’s right. I said “Nerf GUNS.”

I picked up one and took it back over to the sales associate, pointed at it and said, “I thought you don’t carry any guns.”

“Oh, well, that’s a Nerf gun,” he said, not seeing any contradiction in his reply. “We carry those.”

“Do you carry any other guns besides these?” I asked.

“No, sir. We sure don’t. I’ve worked here for over 12 years now and if there were any guns in this store, I would know it. In fact, if you can find another gun here, I’ll buy it for you.”

Well, now I’m on a mission. I walked around the aisle and straight into a display for Star Wars blasters. I picked one up, carried it back to the sales associate, and asked him about it.

“No, sir,” he replied with a smirk. He was obviously enjoying his role in this silly drama we were acting out. “That’s a blaster, not a gun.”

It turns out that We“B”Toys has no end of blasters, phasers, shoot ‘em ups, bang-bangs, and ker-pows, but just no guns.

I wound up buying my son a toy gun phaser that he’s been perfectly happy with, but my question is, why couldn’t the sales associate have just told me what they did have instead of effusing exultantly about what they didn’t have?

As a business owner myself, I can promise you, if We“B”Toys Guy had been on commission or had owned the store, he would’ve put the customer first, rather than the store’s favorite cause du jour.



Real sales people and customer service agents always find a way around problems. Instead of dismissively saying “no,” how about saying, “Let me show you what I’ve got!” Since my little boy was standing right beside me, with a world of expectation and longing in his eyes, why not turn to him and say, “I’ve got a few things I think you’re really going to like, buddy!”

It takes no more effort to turn a negative into a positive and it feels so much better to give a customer good news instead of bad.

And here’s the thing that I think a lot of people miss. The power to be a customer service hero or villain is in your own hands. You decide if people are going to walk away from you blessing or cursing your name. You decide whether people talk about you praising you or regretting their interaction with you. Ultimately, it is you that decides how successful you are going to be in your career.

© 2011 Charles Marshall. Charles Marshall is a nationally known humorous motivational speaker and author. Visit his Web site at [www.charlesmarshall.net](http://www.charlesmarshall.net) or contact him via e-mail at [charles@charlesmarshall.net](mailto:charles@charlesmarshall.net).



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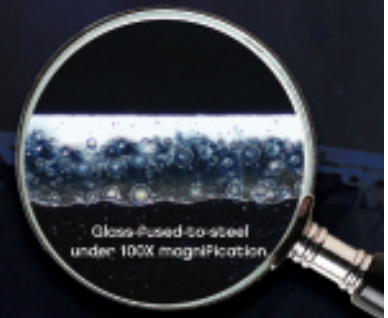
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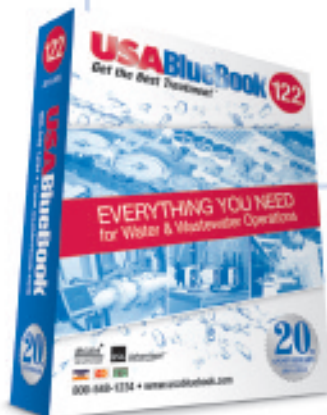
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