



## ROLL WITH THE CHANGES

Jamie Herman | CEO

Whether you believe COVID-19 is a hoax or fear its affects, or lie somewhere in between, I think we can all agree that it has dramatically changed the way many of us look at life and conduct our business. NYRWA has not been exempt from these changes, it has been a difficult year, the likes of which we have never seen before, and I hope we never see again.

As the pandemic unfolded, we worked diligently to learn, assess, and make educated decisions for the health and safety of our employees, as well as the very best interests of our members, both system and associates. Our Board of Directors, Management, and Staff teamed together to forge ahead in ways that were foreign to us, but met the current needs for health and safety and complied with federal and state regulations. As I reflect, I think we all did a pretty good job given the very difficult decisions that faced the association. However, and I blame myself, I do not think I gave enough thought to how these changes could and would affect and impact our staff and members. Changes were necessary, and I'm certain that many of these changes will be with us for many years to come.

Some decisions seemed overwhelming, such as canceling our Annual Conference. We had frequent phone calls with the Board, followed by discussion with the staff. In the end, the decision was basically made for us by federal guidelines and state mandates. With the cancellation of the conference and approximately 20 one-day training sessions, we quickly realized we needed to adapt to meet the needs of our system members. Our staff worked tirelessly to learn and develop webinar style training. My thanks to: Valerie Ogden, Kevin Maine, and Steve Winkley who spearheaded this task. While it may sound easy, they spent countless hours learning the various systems, working with our regulatory agencies for approval, and recruiting speakers for this new reality. This is one change that in my opinion will remain into the future.

A decision that seemed easy at the time eventually turned out to be the most difficult. Due to restrictions, we were forced to develop plans to limit office staff, limit onsite exposure, and work remotely. At the time, I recall how we were somewhat prepared for this process. Over the last 2 years we had developed procedures for our office staff to work remotely from home and access all necessary information. This was a relatively seamless transition, and our staff were willing and able to accomplish the task. We split our office staff; half worked from home while the other half

remained in the office. Our field staff worked remotely from home conducting phone assessments for systems to ascertain information on critical needs, be it chemical additives, personnel, equipment, or PPE. They also physically answered emergency calls and responded to water and wastewater systems as required. As mentioned, this transition was smooth and I gave it very little thought...what a mistake on my part! You see, all people react differently and we cannot expect that changing a person's work regiment will not have an impact on their overall wellbeing. As the days, weeks, and even months passed, I could sense the impact these changes in work environment were having on many of our staff. Here at the NYRWA, our staff are our greatest asset. Noticing the changes and impacts these decisions were having on their demeanor and wellbeing was very difficult, and I'm certain many of you can relate based on shift and personnel changes that were made at your respective systems.

As mentioned, during this "shutdown phase" we re-focused our efforts on developing webinar style training, rescheduling the cancelled one-day sessions so we could hit the ground running once the restrictions were reduced, and Cheryl Kearns was instrumental in negotiating a 20% discount on web-based training through SunCoast Learning. We extend our appreciation to SunCoast Learning for making these pre-approved courses available for our membership at a reduced cost for a few months. Our team also worked diligently on a few proposals that we hope may bring added services to our members in the near future...we will keep you posted.

As with most difficult times, it gives us a time to reflect on what is important in life. While this certainly has not been easy, I do hear from many of you in my travels that you have refocused on things of value. I think we can all agree that these changes have made us all take a look at what we value. From a career standpoint, I most value our staff who are loyal, dedicated, and work unbelievably hard to meet the needs of our membership. Unfortunately, we recently had 3 people who have been with our association for the last quarter century retire from service. Steve Freeman, who represented the Northeast Central Region on the Board, and who has served in every office on the Board, recently retired from the Municipal Commission of Boonville and from our Board of Directors. Steve is a friend to many, a voice of calm and reason, and will be greatly missed. Mr. Bill Pickett from the Village of Brownville was appointed to fill the board vacancy until >>>

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the next election. We welcome Bill and thank him for stepping up to serve the association. Valerie Ogden, our Office Manager, also decided to retire. Valerie has served the association in so many ways from training, home study courses, technical conference planning & development, webinar training creations, assisting with our apprenticeship program, mentoring new employees, and for me, just being that person I could lean on and for being a friend. We wish Valerie all the best in her retirement! Congratulations Valerie! Last, but certainly not least, Doug Smorol retired from the association as well. Doug, along with Valerie, helped grow the association to what it is today. He has served our water system members statewide, and more recently in the central region. Personally, I met Doug in 1998. I appreciated the assistance Doug provided and we looked forward to seeing him when he passed through our area. Don't tell Doug, but he had a big impact on my decision to join the NYRWA and I am proud to call him my friend. Congratulations Doug! We appreciate your dedicated service to this association and our membership! To Steve, Valerie and Doug, you are family, our door is always open to you and there will always be a seat at the NYRWA table for you.

During these times even I have done some reflection. I recall my father saying, "James, faced with difficult circumstances you

need to roll with the changes". I guess he was right. The NYRWA is pleased to announce that during the last 9 months we have added 4 new employees and have a fifth in a new role. Due to retirements and increases in programs, we welcome Kim Bennett, Training Coordinator; Jon Barnes, Water & Wastewater Specialist; Joe Redmond, State TA Provider; Steve Freeman, Circuit Rider; and note that Morris Coolidge has transferred to the newly created Circuit Rider IV position. Pat Scalera always said, "each staff member brings a certain unique talent, together they make a great team". Pat was right, and these new employees bring the same level of commitment and excellence that our members have come to expect. We welcome you all and look forward to a bright future ahead.

Last, the NYRWA Board and Staff wish to thank all of you, our water and wastewater operation specialists and professional associates who have gone way over and above the call to maintain operations during this pandemic. Your loyal service and dedication is noticed and appreciated! You are the best of the best, and continue to prove that on a daily basis. Thank you, and together we will roll with the changes and continue to provide...**Quality on Tap!** 💧💧