



WATER OPERATIONS SPECIALIST LOGS 50 YEARS ON THE JOB

Submitted by Douglas R. Smorol | Circuit Rider II

The following story was submitted by Pete Andrews. Pete runs several systems under contract operations in the Oneonta, NY, area and brought this story to my attention shortly before the deadline for this issue. I have known and worked with Gerry Wenck for over 20 years and all of us here at the New York Rural Water Association wish him the best in his retirement.

After 50 years of operating the Village of Laurens Water System in Otsego County, Gerry Wenck is retiring. Operation of the water system is only one of Jerry's occupations. Laurens is a small village. The water system is a part time endeavor. Nonetheless, it is a 7-day commitment. Gerry has honored that commitment for 50 years, with a small amount of help from others. He has scheduled his activities to check the water system (daily) throughout his career with the area gas utility (NYSE&G) as a master gas fitter and later as a school bus driver. During his few absences and vacations, he always arranged for coverage of duties.

Gerry's adventure in water operations began in 1967. The system was basic at best. His wages at the time were \$1.00 per day to hike through the woods, uphill, to check the level in the reservoir (a laid stone structure). He checked the level with a measuring rod. Springs above the reservoir feed the system. If needed, a single well pumped to keep the reservoir full in dry periods. If Gerry went to the well house, he received a "premium" pay of an additional 50 cents. The springs impounded water in shallow wells. Gerry's periodic chore was to climb down into the springs to remove any debris and "critters" which had the misfortune of falling in. A fair dose of bleach completed the cleaning.

As years passed, mandates from the Health Department and general progress resulted in notice to chlorinate. Gerry installed a system. Next, a liner was installed in the reservoir. The Village studied replacing the aging distribution system in about 1978. No need to rush into it. The distribution system was replaced 30+ years later, in 2008. All through this time, Gerry Wenck was the constant in the water system. Water leaks, repairs, customer complaints; Gerry dealt with them all.

When the system was upgraded, all aged cast iron mains were replaced with ductile iron and poly piping. Services to the curb were replaced. Gerry was there for that also. A new glass lined steel tank, well house upgrade, and radio telemetry enhanced system reliability. All services received water meters.

A dinner honoring Gerry was held at Dobler's Restaurant on January 24, 2017. Many friends and residents, as well as Gerry's family were in attendance. Gerry had told his assistant, Dale Bullock (who now will take over) that he always thought a sign



should be placed at the entrance to the well house. At the dinner Gerry was surprised to learn that Dale had gotten a sign made. The pump house was named in honor of Gerry Wenck.

Many of us water operators and technicians have long careers. Very few see 50 years of service to their community.

Most of us will never get near that milestone but I am sure Gerry's dedication and service provided the citizens of the Village of Laurens "Quality on Tap"! 💧💧💧