



THE SPIGOT

from the NORTH DAKOTA RURAL WATER SYSTEMS ASSOCIATION

AND THE WINNERS ARE...

By Lisa Schatz

Attendees at the 34th Annual Water EXPO and Conference awarded deserving individuals for their dedication, knowledge and commitment to the water industry. This year's awards ceremony took place during the EXPO banquet on Feb. 12 in Fargo.

VALLEY CITY PUBLIC WORKS Wins Water Taste Contest

Thirteen large, small and rural water utilities from around the state submitted samples of their water straight from the tap. Conference attendees narrowed it down to three systems – North Prairie Rural Water District, Valley City Public Works and Southwest Water Authority. The winner of this year's competition was the Valley City Public Works, whose water was chosen by a panel of judges as the most appealing. The panel of judges consisted of Geoff Slick of AE2S, Keegan Richards of Bartlett & West and Jessica Lee, Senator Hoeven's state director. The Valley City Public Works is a member of the North Dakota Rural Water Systems Association (NDRWSA).

The NDRWSA provides technical, managerial and financial assistance to aid municipalities and rural water systems in complying with the federal Safe Drinking Water Act and the Clean Water Act.

The competition is part of a "Quality on Tap!" campaign to emphasize the high quality, standards, and consequently, taste of rural water. Winners of the state contest will compete in a national contest on Capitol Hill in Washington, D.C. This event is part of the NRWA Rural Water Rally, an annual legislative event for the 50 state affiliates of the National Rural Water Association.



Jack Hancock, president NDRWSA, and Wade Hesch, Valley City Water Works superintendent.

GORDY BLIXT Receives Clark Cronquist Waterline Award

Gordy Blixt, Gardner, was presented with the highly prized Clark Cronquist Waterline Award. This award is given to someone who, through their distinctive leadership and perseverance, has gone above and beyond the call of duty in the promotion, development or enhancement of rural water on a state or national level.

Gordy was involved in the water industry for 19 years. He served on the Cass Rural Water District Board for 19 years and served eight years on the executive board for ND Rural Water, two of which were as president. He was a true advocate for rural water.

Gordy served in the U.S. Marine Corps as a radar control operator from 1964 to 1968. He was the 2003 Fargo Rotary Club Farmer of the Year and a member of the Herby Lutheran Church.

Gordy enjoyed meeting people and getting to know people. While traveling, he came upon a fellow traveler whose car had broken down. Gordy towed their vehicle to a repair shop in Fargo. When it was determined the repairs would take several days to complete, Gordy handed the total stranger the keys to his vehicle and told them to complete their trip to South Dakota.

Gordy passed away on Dec. 26, 2019. He was loved by all and will be missed by many.



Jack Hancock, president NDRWSA, and Gordy's wife, Shelah Blixt.

CHARLIE VEIN Awarded Friend of Rural Water

This award is given each year to those individuals who have demonstrated their commitment to providing quality water to North Dakotans through the promotion, development or enhancement of the state association or a local city or rural water system.

Charlie has dedicated his career to improving drinking water quantity and quality for rural residents across North Dakota. Some of the highlights of his career have been working with Langdon Rural Water District, Agassiz Water Users and the Tri-County Water Treatment Plant, which is particularly special because it's the first plant he designed. Charlie was also instrumental in the development of the Grand Forks Traill Water District's Reverse Osmosis Water Treatment Plant. Over the years, he has developed strong relationships with legislators, water agencies and state and federal agencies; all in the name of helping clients access high-quality drinking water.

Charlie's understanding of the importance of good drinking water and his compassion for people has had a positive effect on the quality of life for people in and outside of North Dakota. His career has focused on water supply, treatment and distribution for rural, regional and municipal water systems.



Jack Hancock, president NDRWSA, and Charlie Vein.

LARRY KASSIAN Honored as Outstanding Water Works Employee

Larry Kassian, South Central Regional Water District (SCRWD), received the Outstanding Water Works Employee award. This award is given to a water operator or rural water system manager who has shown outstanding leadership abilities and has performed beyond the normal requirements of their job.

Kassian has contributed to the rural water industry in every phase of his career. First, as a project designer, project supervisor and project manager, and now as a CEO/manager of SCRWD. Less than six weeks into his role as a CEO/manager, SCRWD was recovering from a flood that impacted a large portion of the infrastructure.

Additionally, SCRWD was right in the middle of the largest expansion ever done. Despite personnel issues, a difficult construction season and the stress of recovering from the impacts, Larry and staff kept everything on an even keel and moving forward.

Larry is a graduate of North Dakota State University, a die-hard Bison fan and a quiet University of North Dakota hockey fan. He and his wife have three children and six grandchildren. In his spare time, he likes golfing and spending time with family and friends.

The NDRWSA was formed to coordinate rural water system programs on a statewide basis. The association also provides technical, managerial and financial assistance to aid municipalities and rural water systems in complying with the federal Safe Drinking Water Act and the Clean Water Act.



Jack Hancock, president NDRWSA, and Larry Kassian of South Central Regional Water District.

SANDY BURWICK Receives Outstanding Office Employee Award

Sandy Burwick, Southwest Water Authority, was presented the Outstanding Office Employee award. This award is given to office employees that have gone above and beyond the call of duty to promote water issues to their communities and provide support to management and other decision makers.

Sandy has been involved in the water industry since 1998, and currently works as a chief financial officer/office administrator. She is responsible for managing numerous office functions such as budgeting, preparation for the annual audit, financial planning, and maintaining the accounting system.

Sandy is willing to take on any task and succeeds in accomplishing them in an efficient and effective manner. "She is a valuable employee and is well recognized and appreciated by the board of directors, management and staff. Sandy has a high degree of dedication and professionalism that she brings to her job every day," says Mary Massad, CEO of Southwest Water Authority.

Sandy and her husband have two daughters and two grandsons. In their spare time, they enjoy traveling to Arizona and stock car races during the summer.