

Computer Corner

Counting Blessings, Reflecting on Accomplishments, Taking Stock and Planning Ahead

Harvest season for most is over and winter is on our doorstep.

On my grandparent's farm, this time of the year meant busy days canning, pickling, smoking meats and hauling jars to restock the root cellar for the upcoming winter. It was also the time for making some of grandma's famous German blood sausage, head sausage, and, with the upcoming deer season, pork/venison sausage, jerky and more. The fall holiday season also meant it was time to make a batch of grandma's special drink, locally famous in the German farming community, 'Sneaky Pete'. She'd probably also have in-the-works a little homemade wine and preserves from grandpa's peach, apple, and plum trees, grapes from the garden, and even dandelions. Grandma usually kept a giant stoneware jug somewhere on the place that was always fermenting a batch of homemade beer. In all my years, I never saw anyone have more than 'ONE' drink per day – as that was one of grandma's rules to a healthy life.

As the saying goes, "ONE drink per day keeps the doctor away."

What wonderful Salt-of-the-Earth people they were. I can still hear, "He needs a bigger glass of tea! Merle, he needs a bigger glass of tea – go get 'em one of those big peanut butter jars out of the cabinet."

I remember the Lutheran minister and his wife coming to the farm each month for an

evening visit and card games of Pitch or Pinochle around the farm kitchen table, with grandma pouring everyone a special treat – 'ONE' little shot glass taste of her latest batch of 'Sneaky Pete' or one of her other homemade brews.

I can't help but admire how 'down to earth' my grandparents were and how hard they worked day after day on the Kansas family farm. I can still hear my grandma repeating one of her favorite sayings as she toiled away in the garden or kitchen – "It's a great life if you don't weaken!"

I admired and marveled at the skills of my grandfather as he labored and I assisted him in the annual fall harvest as he masterfully carved and bundled the various steaks, roasts, loins, and packaged lots of wonderful ground beef and sausage, filling the 'ice chest', his name for the freezer, for winter.

This time of year, I'd be looking forward with excitement and making plans for the upcoming quail and deer seasons because I would get to go hunting with my grandpa. The other day I saw a couple of young people out to eat with folks I am pretty sure were their grandparents. Each kid had his nose buried in his smartphones. Will they someday look back and wish they had taken advantage of each precious moment with those beloved gray-haired souls?

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Fall is also the time of the year our water office clerks, managers, and board/council members should 'Count Their Blessings', Reflect on the season's accomplishments, take stock and plan for the winter and year ahead.

Count blessings to be found in the workplace!

As a clerk, maintenance person, office manager or other staff, do you have a good board of directors or city council that treats you well, rewards your efforts on their

behalf, and appreciates you? Are you blessed with good board members/council members who are serving for the right reasons and truly try to do what is best for their staff and the members of the water district or city residents? I'm sure that many of our customers, when examining their blessings at work, would also think of some of their special customers – those who are always reliable, kind and courteous, even when there is some sort of difficulty.

Plan ahead . . .

Here are just a few of the exciting technology advancements announced this year and those cities and RWDs should plan for.

Microsoft sent me an email this past month reminding me to inform all our customers that they now have less than 500 days until support for Windows 7 ends. At this point, unless there is a really valid reason like old electronic meter reading or telemetry monitoring equipment that only works on the old computer equipment and old Windows version; everyone in the water industry should have already upgraded or be planning upgrades soon to modern office computer equipment with Intel i7 processors, SSD (Solid State) drives, and Windows 10 Operating System.

There were huge advancements in technology this year. Processor chip technology has made some great advancement with new technologies emerging from Intel, AMD, Micron, Nvidia, and Qualcomm.

Standards for the new WIFI WPA3 encryption protocol were approved just days after our last article in the July issue of *The Kansas Lifeline* on the subject. This new generation of WIFI routers will fix several existing security weaknesses with the current WPA2 technology and also fix the decade-long problem of data exposure of WIFI connections in public places by using a new WPA3 'individualized data encryption' standard.

Qualcomm is an American semiconductor and telecommunications equipment company that designs and markets wireless telecommunications products and services. Not as well known as Intel, AMD and others, they've been around since 1985, with a group of seven people meeting in a den in San Diego making plans to create quality communications products. Today that den has expanded to more than 170 offices in more than 40 countries.

Qualcomm has a habit of making big news in the world of technology, the latest being their announcement of a new Atheros WCN3998 chip with WPA3, 802.11ax and Bluetooth 5.1 that is already available for use in nearly all modern electronic communication devices. New products will be flooding the market over the next year as nearly every existing WIFI capable device embraces this huge advancement in

technology. D-Link, Netgear and Asus have already announced new WPA3 routers that will also include the new 802.11ax. The new AX improves WIFI network capacity and averages four times the throughput speed of today's 802.11ac WIFI. This new generation of WPA3 WIFI routers includes the long-needed 'super secure' WPA3 encryption technology for safe WIFI connections even in public places and superfast AX multi frequency data transmission that will dramatically improve WIFI transmission range, improve multi-user performance and perform many times faster than existing WIFI systems. Industry leaders projected the first of these new devices would begin to hit the market in September or October 2018.

In the fast changing computer technology of today's world, if computer equipment is more than five (5) years old, it's the old technology and is probably due for replacement, update or upgrade. We are now starting to see the same kind of advancements in the electronic controls, monitoring, and electronic meter reading side of things. Electronic meter reading technologies that used to be way out of the price range for many smaller water systems are coming down within the price range of most, even the smallest water systems.

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From the desk of Linda Windler:

I usually do some little cartoon to go along with the Computer Corner Column Merle or I, or both of us, as a team, write. After Merle finished this article, he gave it to me to proof. I was very touched by his sentiments, and, instead of a cartoon, I was inspired to amend a traditional prayer of Thanksgiving...

**For food that stays our hunger,
For rest that brings us ease,
For homes where memories linger,
We give our thanks for these.
And, let us not forget, oh Lord,
When we bow our heads to pray,
To thank you for clean water,
That sustains us everyday.
And, when we thank you for the things we have,
Let us not leave out,
Thanks to you, for the folks,
That bring these things about.
Family and friends who are there for us,
And folks who serve the common good,
People who make our communities strong,
Country, State, and neighborhood.**

As a board or council member, do you have a good staff working for you? Realizing that 'good people' are the power behind ANY organization, do you appreciate them, invest in them, and reward them properly?

Time to take stock . . .

How are we doing? Do we have our water quality and water loss where they should be? Is our water system financially solvent? Are we covering expenses and putting money away for planned upgrades and anticipated infrastructure maintenance, as well as unexpected repair costs and other financial events? How is our staff doing? Is our office computer equipment and software more than five years old and ready for upgrade? Is our operator or maintenance staff in need of equipment and/or training? What known problems or anticipated upcoming problems might we need to deal with? As grandma stocked the root cellar to provide food stores until the next harvest season, are you insuring that your water system or other utilities are prepared for the future?

As responsible leaders for water and other utility systems, let us all count our blessings, reflect on our accomplishments, take stock of what we have and where we are going, and plan ahead for the future.

Our company is constantly upgrading our equipment and software and investing in our most valuable asset: Our People. We regularly attend conferences and training classes on emerging technologies for our industry. Do you? it's time to plan ahead. We hope to see you at the 2019 KRWA Conference & Exhibition March 26 – 28 in Wichita. It's appropriately themed, "Planting Good Ideas, Harvesting Results".

Merle Windler and his wife Linda are owners of Thoroughbred Systems, Inc., Topeka. The company specializes in utility billing for cities and rural districts, computer networking and associated training. Contact: merlewindler@yahoo.com



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Software Products for Cities and Water Districts

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We've used Thoroughbred for years, even back when the customers read their own meters.

We're really hi-tech these days with the latest version of Thoroughbred and Windows 10.

I send traditional printed bills through the U.S. Mail to less than half of my customers now, 'cuz now we also have things like email notices & billing, automatic banking & Internet Pay.

The program's like Burger King, it "Lets us have it our way", with queries and custom reports.

There are tons of features that help with everything from water loss to keeping on top of delinquent accounts, rate code studies, work orders, mail merge letters, you name it,

all for a low purchase price. Best of all, human beings answer the phone & help me for FREE!

You'll love it, startup training can be in person in the water office or via the phone & Internet.

And, there are **NO YEARLY FEES**, I get FREE tech support and FREE upgrades for five years.

Now, if they could just teach my computer to serve up a hot cup of coffee in the morning,

IT WOULD BE PERFECT!!!!