

# IN THE PIPE



## NEWSLETTER

Spring/Summer 2015

No. 10

### A Day in the Life of a WCSA Water Plant Operator

*Note: The following is the second in a series of articles on a day in the life of a WCSA employee.*

The first half of the “Jack of all trades, master of none” figure of speech certainly applies to WCSA plant operator Gary Van Huss, but anyone who has worked with him can attest to the fact that the second half most definitely does not.

A WCSA employee since October 1977, Gary began his nearly 38-year tenure with the water authority as a meter reader. In 1982, he moved to the Middle Fork Drinking Water Plant as a plant operator, a position he has held ever since. However, Gary wears multiple hats at WCSA. He has also served as WCSA’s lab manager and compliance officer for the past several years. But he doesn’t stop there.

“What Gary does day-in and day-out is keep us compliant with the Virginia Department of Health (VDH) and Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) monitoring requirements, and there’s a lot to that,” says Don Cole, production manager at the Middle Fork Drinking Water Plant. “Unlike most guys who work in a lab, though, Gary also helps operate the plant, goes out and collects samples



Gary Van Huss

himself, and even performs maintenance on equipment. He loves to work. I often tell him that when he retires, it will take three people to replace him. If we can just stay in his trail behind him and keep him in sight, we’re doing well! He’s a real asset to the company and has been for many years.”

WCSA’s lab is certified by the state to perform Total Coliform, E. Coli and other microbiological analysis of drinking water for the areas served by the utility.

“For many smaller utilities, it’s not economical for them to justify performing these types of tests, so they outsource

testing to private labs,” Gary says. “While we do outsource our chemical analysis samples to the Division of Consolidated Laboratory Services (DCLS), it is more economical for us to perform the microbiological testing in-house. There’s one type of test in particular — most probable number (MPN) — that has to be collected and analyzed within an eight-hour window of time, and it’s pretty much impossible to outsource that. That’s just one example. To meet the criteria for analyzing certain types of samples, we need to have our own lab.”

According to Don, WCSA performs approximately 150 bacteria samples per

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# WCSA Project Updates

To learn more about WCSA projects, visit our website at [www.wcsawater.com](http://www.wcsawater.com), highlight "Capital Projects" and select "Capital Projects Update" from the drop-down menu. This will provide a comprehensive overview of WCSA's current water and wastewater projects.

## Ongoing Projects:



The **Galvanized Water Line Replacement — Phase 2 Project** is the second step in a three-phase project to replace all galvanized pipe in WCSA's distribution system over the next several years. Phase 1 was recently finished, and construction on Phase 2 began in September 2014 and is expected to continue throughout 2015.

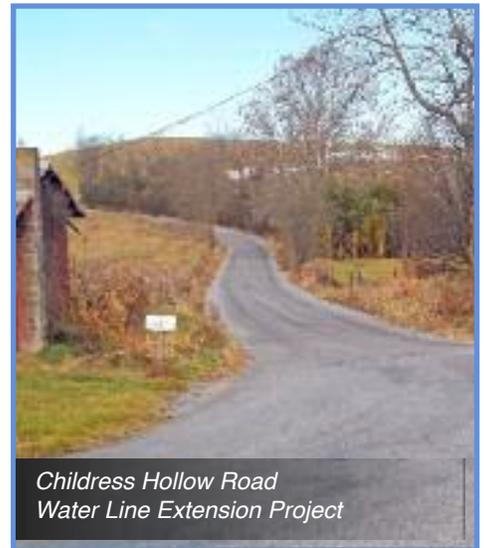


The **Hidden Valley Phase 1 Water System Extension Project** will extend water service along Porterfield Highway to the Hidden Valley Road intersection, and northward along Hidden Valley Road to an approximate elevation of 2,500 feet (near Chestnut Grove Community Church). Water service will be provided beyond this location via a follow-up extension project that will require a booster pump station and water storage tank. Water for this service area will be provided by the Russell County Public Service Authority. Construction began in April 2015.

The **Childress Hollow Road Water Line Extension Project** will extend water service along Childress Hollow Road from Spring Valley Road to Black Hollow Road. The project will consist of an estimated 9,600 linear feet of new

water line and will provide water service to approximately 12 residential connections. Construction is expected to begin in July 2015.

The **Exit 13 Phase 2A Sewer Project**, located off I-81 at Exit 13, is the second step in a multi-phase project to extend wastewater treatment service to the Lee Highway area of Exit 13. Phase 2A will consist of installation of a sewer main from Spring Creek Road to Virginia Highlands Airport, as well as some branch lines or laterals to provide service for customers who are not directly adjacent to the Oak Park Sewer Project. Designs will be completed in May 2015, and work on easement acquisition has begun. 💧



## Congratulations



**Joey Forster** has successfully completed the requirements for his Class 3 Water Operator License. Joey has been employed with WCSA since July 2013.

**Ryan Kiser** has successfully completed the requirements for his Professional Engineering License. Ryan has been employed with WCSA since August 2012.

**Travis Brown** has been promoted to crew chief. Travis has been employed with WCSA since October 2007. He was promoted from a crew worker to equipment operator in December 2012.



a chlorine odor, and we go out and collect a sample for testing and try to determine what might be causing a problem,” Gary says. “Also, each day we must ensure EPA compliance, monitor our discharge back to the streams and waterways for the DEQ, and send daily reports to the health department on how many gallons of water we’ve treated that day, chlorine residuals, turbidity levels, pH levels, alkalinity, hardness, and several other things.”

month on the water treatment system.

“Gary has a long list of other contaminants for which we are required to test, so we’re also continually collecting samples to send off to various labs,” Don says. “The monitoring regulations are always changing, so he has a lot to keep up with.”

The regulations for monitoring are frequently revised and updated as the EPA determines new goals or limits for public and private utilities.

“As various chemicals are developed and manufactured, the EPA conducts a lot of testing to determine if there are any associated health effects, then it sets forth new monitoring levels,” Gary says. “Additionally, the technology to monitor and treat is continually evolving, too. Limits have become stricter than they used to be, along with the monitoring frequency. The more water you produce and process, the more tests you have to perform. It has become more complicated as WCSA has grown.”

Each day, Gary works closely with the plant’s production manager, the VDH Office of Water Programs, the EPA and the DEQ, and also handles monitoring for customer-related issues.

“People call about plumbing problems or

To accomplish all that, Gary arrives at work by 6:30 each morning.

“When I come in, the very first thing I do is make sure we’ve got water to make coffee and that the coffee’s made,” Gary quips. “Next, we usually have a department meeting, where I handle the call-out sheets and anything that maintenance might need help with for that day. After that, I try to determine what samples need to be obtained and shipped that day, and then work out a route to cover certain geographical areas of our service territory in an efficient manner.”

Additionally, each piece of lab equipment requires a sterile check at various intervals.

“We have to perform a sterile check on every lot of sample bottles every 90 days,” Gary says. “There are tests we have to perform on equipment, such as spore tests on sterilizers, and thermometers that have to be checked every six months. Control checks have to be performed on everything from the scales that weigh the equipment to the lab’s distilled water — anything that is used for testing has to be checked. I even have to use known bacteria cultures to check that the culture medium is doing what it’s designed for before it can even be used. There’s a lot of documentation, and I really have to take my job very seriously because it affects public health. Accuracy matters.”

WCSA is regulated by many different agencies and statutes. The two primary agencies are the Virginia Department of Health (VDH) Office of Water Programs and the Virginia Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ). Permits issued by these agencies direct WCSA to statewide regulations in general and then set forth specific regulations unique to the environment, such as the stream from which the utility withdraws or to which it discharges, and the type of facility it operates.

Under provisions of the Safe Drinking Water Act (SDWA), laboratories must be certified by the Division of Consolidated Laboratory Services (DCLS) to perform microbiological and chemical analysis of drinking water for public water systems in the Commonwealth of Virginia. The VDH Office of Drinking Water (ODW) has been given primary authority to oversee SDWA requirements and receives all data resulting from the analysis of drinking water samples.

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When he's away from the lab, the Washington County native enjoys hunting and gardening in his spare time.

"Anytime I get a chance to deer or turkey hunt, I do," Gary says. "That and gardening help to relieve the stress at work. I grew up on a farm in the Watauga community a couple of miles from the water plant, so I really enjoy being outdoors as much as I can."

Gary and his wife, Martha, are newlyweds, having married last September, and Gary now enjoys family time with her two sons and his "beautiful four-year-old granddaughter, whom I like

to spoil rotten!"

But the responsibility of his job is never far from his mind.

"A good water supply is very important, and, like a major highway, is part of what draws people to a locality," Gary says. "A lot of people take it for granted, though, and don't understand all that goes into providing this much-needed public service. Some people even think water ought to be free, but we contribute to the health of the public by working weekends, holidays and overtime to make sure their water is a safe, steady product." 

## WCSA Receives Approval for First Step in Process to Build Wastewater Treatment Plant



WCSA's request for a special-exception permit was recently approved by the Washington County Board of Supervisors. The permit is one of many steps in a process for potentially building a new wastewater treatment plant in the county.

Several possible expansion options have been offered for providing additional capacity to meet an anticipated need for 1.5 million gallons per day over the next 40 years. Three of those solutions include expanding capacity with the Town of Abingdon, with which WCSA has an agreement to handle 1 million gallons per day. Another suggested option is to expand capacity with BVU Authority, with which WCSA has an agreement to handle 572,000

gallons per day. The third option is to build another plant.

WCSA is currently considering a site along Bordwine Road for the potential treatment plant. If constructed, the proposed plant would initially provide another half-million gallons per day and could later be expanded to provide 1.5 million gallons per day. It is estimated that the necessary permits from the Department of Environmental Quality will be received by the end of 2015, while it may take up to two years to complete design work and obtain the required financing for the plant project. In the meantime, WCSA continues to work with the Town of Abingdon and BVU Authority to explore the other suggested options. 



WCSA offices will be closed on the following holidays:

**Memorial Day**      **May 25**

**Independence Day**      **July 3**



### Board Meetings

#### UPCOMING BOARD MEETING DATES

May 18, 2015

June 22, 2015

July 27, 2015

Board meetings are held at WCSA in the E.W. Potts Board Room at 6 p.m. The public is welcome to attend.

*Actual dates may vary. Please contact our office to confirm all meeting dates.*

#### REMINDER

**AVOID THE TIME AND EXPENSE OF MAILING AND POSTAGE WITH WCSA'S AUTO-DRAFT, ONLINE BILLPAY OR 24/7 PAY BY PHONE.**

**CALL OUR CUSTOMER SERVICE DEPARTMENT AT 276-628-7151 FOR DETAILS.**

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