

Awards Program



Water Environment
Association of Texas



 **TEXAS**

Section • American Water Works Association

In memory

Please join TAWWA and WEAT in remembering these water professionals who died since we last met in 2025.

Dr. James Barnard
Michael Chandler
Steven M. Clouse
Randy Goss
Thaddeus Green

Paul Hallet
Kathy Kyle
Harvey Mitschke
John Pate
Patrick Riley

David Silguero
Robert Taylor
Kevin Wallace
Natcha Winslow

Texas Water™ Code of Conduct

The Water Environment Association of Texas and Texas Section of American Water Works Association are dedicated to providing a safe, harassment-free experience for everyone during Texas Water™ and official Texas Water™ conference events.

WEAT and TAWWA will not tolerate harassment of conference attendees, exhibitors, speakers, volunteers, or staff. WEAT and TAWWA prohibit Texas Water™ participants from intimidating, harassing, unwelcome, abusive, disruptive, violent or

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Awards Luncheon

April 28, 2026, 11:30 a.m.

Hemisfair Ballroom C 1, 2, 3

WATER ENVIRONMENT ASSOCIATION OF TEXAS

COMMUNITY CONNECTION AWARD

...recognizes individuals and organizations who encourage a welcoming workforce culture in the Texas clean water sector.

David Garza

David Garza is the director of wastewater systems for McAllen Public Utility, a role he has held since 2017, building upon a distinguished 26-year career in the water profession that began in 1998 as a wastewater laboratory technician.

His journey, marked by a commitment to public service, was profoundly influenced by his family's resilient work ethic, which drives his philosophy: "Every day, I know I'm doing something meaningful for the community."

A key pillar of his leadership is his exceptional dedication to fostering inclusion and professional belonging. Garza spearheads the annual RGV Utility Conference, a landmark event that unites every utility in the Rio Grande Valley and engineers from across Texas. This initiative actively bridges gaps between seasoned professionals and emerging talents, promoting knowledge-sharing and cultivating a supportive, interconnected community.

His approach is distinctly characterized by publicly recognizing individuals from all corners of the industry, celebrating "unsung heroes" and highlighting diverse roles to foster an atmosphere of appreciation and mutual respect.

Beyond his role at McAllen Public Utility, Garza actively promotes staff participation in organizations like the Water Environment Association Texas and the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality Water Utility Operator Licensing Advisory Committee, building networks and expertise across the sector.

His local community involvement is equally significant, having served as president of the Boys & Girls Club of Pharr-San Juan and a board member for over a decade.

Garza's professional excellence is underscored by historic achievements, including becoming the first Hispanic in Texas to earn "Triple 'A' status"—holding the Texas Water Utilities Association's laboratory analyst "a" certification, TCEQ "A" wastewater operator license, and TCEQ "A" water operator license. He is also a certified water professional, a certified public manager, and an adjunct instructor for the Texas A&M Engineering Extension Service. His leadership, driven by a desire to serve and an active commitment to mentorship and community building, makes him an exemplary figure in the water sector, and we are proud to recognize him with our 2026 Community Connection Award.

WATER ENVIRONMENT ASSOCIATION OF TEXAS

EMERGING LEADER AWARD

.....recognizes a young member of WEAT who has provided outstanding service in support of the Association in the form of committee involvement, recruiting, volunteer time, event participation, or other contributions.

Fernando Olivas

Fernando Olivas has made a strong contribution to the water environment sector through his committed professionalism and effective leadership in establishing and expanding the Water Environment Association of Texas in Far West Texas. As one of the founding members of the Franklin Mountain Section in El Paso, Olivas has been central to building a strong foundation for professional development, collaboration, and community engagement in the region.

Colleagues recognize his steady commitment and approachable leadership. “Fernando’s professionalism, reliability, and hands-on commitment have been instrumental in the section’s early success and continued momentum,” notes one peer. “He is passionate about supporting the profession and expanding opportunities for young and emerging professionals.”

Olivas has demonstrated strong dedication, serving in multiple key section leadership roles over the past three years: treasurer, vice president, and currently president. His consistent and valuable contributions include coordinating numerous WEAT-related activities. He has organized technical seminars and lunch-and-learns, facilitated networking events, supported regional operator trainings, and championed student outreach.

As vice president, he initiated key collaborations with local utilities and engineering firms, and as president, he leads strategic planning and new initiatives that align with WEAT’s statewide mission.

His dedication extends to every major section event since inception, representing the section in statewide WEAT leadership meetings and advocating for the inclusion of Far West Texas issues. His energy and reliability have made him a cornerstone of the section’s operations, and his leadership has substantially increased member engagement and visibility for WEAT in an area previously underrepresented.

Olivas’s leadership, organizational skills, and genuine enthusiasm for the water environment field have strengthened the WEAT community and inspired others to become active contributors. He is consistently described as a dedicated and reliable leader who embodies the future leadership WEAT seeks to recognize.

With his notable contributions to establishing a lasting WEAT footprint in the El Paso region, his professional achievements, and his commitment to advancing the industry, Fernando Olivas exemplifies the qualities recognized by the WEAT Emerging Leader Award.

List of previous Emerging Leader Award winners is on the next page.

**WATER ENVIRONMENT ASSOCIATION OF TEXAS
EMERGING LEADER AWARD WINNERS**

2002	Michael F. Bloom	2010	Meera Victor	2019	Kristin O’Neill
2002	Rebecca Patterson Guthrie	2011	Jeff Sober	2020	Allison Blake
2003	Dennis Laskowski	2012	Erin Flanagan	2021	Nyla Langford
2004	Heather Harris	2013	Josh Marazzini	2022	Heather Wootton
2005	Randy Lee Bush	2014	Jason Crawley	2023	Eric Kong
2006	Jennafer “Jenna” Piper Covington	2015	Lindsay Kovar	2024	Kaylee Waldo
2007	Jennifer “Jennie” T. Almerico	2016	Brigit Buff	2025	Jenni Griesel
2008	Naomi Azulai	2017	Matt Jalbert		
2009	Tarlton “Trooper” Smith	2018	Lance Rothe		

**WATER ENVIRONMENT ASSOCIATION OF TEXAS
OUTSTANDING PUBLIC OFFICIAL AWARD**

...recognizes an elected official or regulator who actively promotes sound science in environmental policy and regulations.

State Representative Cody Harris

Cody Harris is a fifth generation resident of East Texas, representing the constituents of Texas House District 8, which comprises Anderson, Cherokee, Henderson and Navarro counties.

A lifelong Texan, his ancestral roots were established in Freestone County just after the Civil War. Harris entered the Texas House in 2019 and has ushered in landmark bills that directly impact lives across the state. He is at the forefront for water funding, nuclear research and implementation, and pharmacy reforms.

Harris has served on the Calendars Committee, and the Licensing and Administrative Procedures Committee, and was appointed by Governor Abbott to serve as the Commissioner of the Southwestern States Water Commission and was the co-chair of the State Water Implementation Fund for Texas Advisory Committee.

Water focused legislation has been a recurring highlight of Harris’s tenure in public office, and

he has sponsored and authored several pieces of significant, water-focused legislation. He was a cosponsor of the 88th Legislature’s SB 28, which established the Texas Water Fund. During the 89th session he was appointed chair of the Natural Resources Committee, where he authored HJR 7 and sponsored SB 7 - leading Texas to make historic strategic investments in the state’s water infrastructure as well as in securing new water sources. This legislation and the subsequent, successful ballot proposition, will deliver an unprecedented \$20 billion of investment in water resources and lifesaving water infrastructure that WEAT members design and operate.

He was awarded the 2025 Rainmaker of the Year award from the Texas Water Foundation and Legislator of the Year by the Texas Nuclear Alliance.

Proud parents, Harris and his wife, Taylor, have three sons and one daughter. The family is active at First Baptist Church where he serves as a deacon.

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A graduate of Texas A&M University, he has a background in real estate and banking. He is also a graduate of the Texas Agricultural Lifetime Leadership Program, former president of the Palestine YMCA board of directors, former president of the Palestine Young Professionals

Network and a former member of the Palestine Area Chamber of Commerce board of directors.

WEAT is delighted to recognize Chair Harris and his Senate counterpart, Charles Perry, as our 2026 Outstanding Public Official Awardees.

WATER ENVIRONMENT ASSOCIATION OF TEXAS

OUTSTANDING PUBLIC OFFICIAL AWARD

...recognizes an elected official or regulator who actively promotes sound science in environmental policy and regulations.

State Senator Charles Perry, District 28

State Sen. Charles Perry is a life-long West Texan and a practicing certified public accountant from Lubbock. He was elected to the Texas Senate in 2014 and chairs the Senate Committee on Water, Agriculture, and Rural Affairs. He is vice-chair of the Senate Health and Human Services Committee, sits on the Senate committees for Finance, State Affairs, and Transportation, and co-chairs the State Water Implementation Fund for Texas Advisory Committee and the Texas Infrastructure Resiliency Fund.

Sen. Perry is considered to be the preeminent thought leader in the Texas water policy space, and has endeavoured over several sessions to secure funding for water infrastructure and establish long range water resources planning at the state level. He is a member of the Southwestern States Water Commission and the Western States Water Council.

Outside his work in the Legislature, Sen. Perry has served his community as past president of the Lubbock Boys and Girls Club, American Business Clubs, and Community Partners, and previously served on the board of the National Council on Family Violence and the Women's Protective Services of Lubbock. He also serves as a deacon at his church, Southcrest Baptist, in Lubbock. He has

been married to his wife, Jacklyn, for over 40 years and together they have a daughter, Jordan, and a son, Matthew, and five grandchildren. The entire family are graduates of Texas Tech University.

Water focused legislation has been a recurring highlight of Harris's tenure in public office. During the 89th session he was appointed chair of the Natural Resources Committee, where he authored House Joint Resolution 7 and sponsored Senate Bill 7 - leading Texas to make historic strategic investments in the state's water infrastructure as well as in securing new water sources. This legislation and the subsequent, successful ballot proposition, will deliver an unprecedented \$20 billion of investment in water resources and lifesaving water infrastructure that WEAT members design and operate.

This push for a generational investment in Texas' water resources reached its culmination in the 88th and 89th Legislatures. Sen. Perry authored Senate Bill 28, which established the Texas Water Fund, and in the subsequent session authored Senate Bill 7, which he described as "the most significant state investment in water infrastructure in Texas history." SB 7 and its enabling legislation HJR 7, along with the subsequently successfully ballot proposition, will deliver a historic \$20 billion to

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the Texas Water Fund. This is both an investment in the essential infrastructure and services that WEAT members design and operate, and a recognition of the central role our water resources, and the professional management of those

resources, play in the Texas miracle. WEAT is pleased to recognize Sen. Perry, and his counterpart Rep. Cody Harris, for their longtime leadership in the water policy space, they are our Outstanding Public Official Awardees for 2026.

WATER ENVIRONMENT ASSOCIATION OF TEXAS

OUTSTANDING PUBLIC OFFICIAL AWARD

...recognizes an elected official or regulator who actively promotes sound science in environmental policy and regulations.

Jaya Zyman, P.E.

Jaya Zyman is a board-certified professional engineer in Texas. She holds a B.S. in biochemical engineering and an M.S. in environmental and water resources engineering, both from the University of Texas at Austin. She is a recognized leader in the state's clean water sector with a career spanning over three decades.

Prior to joining the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality, Zyman spent 23 years in the private sector as a consultant with multi-national environmental engineering firms. Her professional responsibilities included managing major projects in water quality, industrial and municipal wastewater treatment design and permitting, and leading the Water Quality and National Environmental Policy Act team within the regulatory compliance group.

Zyman joined the TCEQ in May 2009, starting in the water quality division as the team leader for the Storm Water and Pretreatment Team. She was promoted to assistant division director of the Water Quality Division in February 2011, where she oversaw division projects, developed implementation plans for wastewater permitting,

and coordinated legislative functions. Her work included communicating regulatory and technical information to agency staff, officials, the public, and the regulated community, as well as interpreting state and federal rules.

In February 2015, she was promoted to deputy director, and subsequently director, of the Occupational Licensing and Registration Division within the Office of Waste. In this capacity, she directed the Registration and Reporting and the Occupational Licensing Sections, overseeing occupational licensing and registration for the state of Texas.

Described as “a cornerstone of the Texas clean water sector” by those who have worked with her, Zyman worked to bridge the gap between the public and private sectors, and promote sound science in environmental regulation. She retired from the TCEQ in February 2026, after more than 15 years of service. WEAT is delighted to recognize her dedication to Texas' water environment with the 2026 Outstanding Public Official Award - Agency Category.

WATER ENVIRONMENT ASSOCIATION OF TEXAS

EXEMPLARY EMPLOYER AWARD

.....recognizes Texas employers who support and facilitate their employees' involvement and activities within the WEAT and WEF organizations, with special consideration given to those employers who foster the involvement and activities among Young Professional WEAT members.

CDM Smith

From its inception, CDM Smith has had a longstanding commitment to the broader clean water sector and strong support for meaningful employee engagement within the Water Environment Association of Texas. As a global leader in water, environmental, and infrastructure solutions, CDM Smith fosters a mission-driven culture of community impact, professional growth, and stewardship of water resources, encouraging involvement at all career stages for a well-rounded career.

A key component of CDM Smith's support for WEAT participation is its culture of encouraging involvement across all career stages, particularly among young professionals. The firm believes that strong industry organizations are built by active member involvement and proudly sponsored the Young Professional and Student Reception at the 2025 Texas Water Conference. This support reflects a commitment to cultivating future leaders and fostering mentorship, networking, and professional development across the water sector.

The firm's commitment extends to employees taking on significant leadership and service roles across WEAT. Staff members have held key positions at the state and section levels, demonstrating a dedication to organizational service. For example, Kim Chanslor serves as WEAT Awards Committee co-chair and

Stormwater/Watershed Management Committee chair, while Chris Varnon holds the WEAT Philanthropy chair and co-chairs Southeast Texas Water for People events. Additionally, Amy Robinson, a former North Texas Section president, and Sarah Hawkins, the North Texas Section Philanthropy chair, exemplify the firm's encouragement of service within the organization.

CDM Smith actively supports technical knowledge-sharing and critical industry conversations within WEAT. Professionals contribute specialized expertise as chairs and co-chairs of key technical committees, such as Samir Mathur (Municipal Resource Recovery and Design co-chair) and Ajay Shrivastav (MMRDC Texas Water subcommittee chair), advancing sustainable wastewater and resource recovery initiatives. Furthermore, Stacy Barna advances critical conversations on statewide water and wastewater funding as chair of the Utility Funding Ad-hoc Committee. This sustained dedication to leadership, committee service, philanthropy, and mentorship reflects CDM Smith's core belief in strengthening the water profession through active engagement and collaboration.

In recognition of their consistent presence at all levels of WEAT volunteer involvement, WEAT is pleased to recognize CDM Smith as our Private Sector Exemplary Employer Awardee for 2026.

Professional Ethics Workshop For Engineers
Wednesday, April 29, 1:30 p.m. to 3 p.m.

WATER ENVIRONMENT ASSOCIATION OF TEXAS

EXEMPLARY EMPLOYER AWARD

.....recognizes Texas employers who support and facilitate their employees' involvement and activities within the WEAT and WEF organizations, with special consideration given to those employers who foster the involvement and activities among Young Professional WEAT members.

San Antonio River Authority

The San Antonio River Authority has been a long-time supporter of WEAT and routinely encourages employees to join as members, and engage and volunteer at the state and local level. The River Authority covers yearly membership dues for employees across multiple departments including engineers, environmental scientists, executives, and operators. SARA provides financial assistance to employees looking to participate in local monthly meetings, attend Leadership Summits, Texas Water and other state/national conferences, like WEFTEC, and supports participation in social events, such as the YP Pickleball tournaments.

SARA participates in many functions during Texas Water beyond staff participation including

hosting facility tours and the Curtis Smalley Environmental Event. The river authority also annually sponsors the Hill Country Section's largest fundraiser, the annual Scholarship Dinner. Beyond financial participation – the river authority supports the mission of WEAT/WEF and conducts trash clean up events such as the annual Basura Bash, and recently signed off on WEAT's WIPPES (Wastewater Infrastructure Pollution Prevention and Environmental Safety Act) letter.

For their support of WEAT membership and the broader WEAT mission at every level of their organization, WEAT is delighted to recognize the San Antonio River Authority with our 2026 Public Sector Exemplary Employer Award.

WATER ENVIRONMENT ASSOCIATION OF TEXAS

DENNIS R. LASKOWSKI RECRUITMENT AWARD

...recognizes members of WEAT for their outstanding recruitment efforts in the past year.

Guadalupe Blanco River Authority

The Guadalupe Blanco River Authority was created in 1933 as a water conservation and reclamation district and a public corporation. In its current incarnation, GBRA provides stewardship for the water resources in its ten-county statutory district, which begins near the headwaters of the Guadalupe and Blanco Rivers, ends at San Antonio Bay, and includes Kendall, Comal, Hays, Caldwell, Guadalupe, Gonzales, DeWitt, Victoria, Calhoun and Refugio counties.

GBRA became a WEAT utility member in 2025, and, with the help of Eric Kong and others, held a membership drive at which 45 employees became WEAT members.

Congratulations to everyone at GBRA for an outstanding recruitment effort, recognized with WEAT's Dennis Laskowski Recruitment Award.

WATER ENVIRONMENT ASSOCIATION OF TEXAS

DENNIS R. LASKOWSKI RECRUITMENT AWARD

...recognizes members of WEAT for their outstanding recruitment efforts in the past year.

McAllen Public Utilities

As a longtime WEAT Utility Member, McAllen Public Utilities is no stranger to sharing the benefits of WEAT membership with new and existing employees. In 2025, MPU renewed their utility membership and added 46 new WEAT

members to their roster. Special thanks to Marco Vega, David Garza, and Michael Gonzalez for their efforts to strengthen and grow WEAT's membership presence in the Rio Grande Valley.

WATER ENVIRONMENT FEDERATION

OUTSTANDING SERVICE AWARD

...recognizes the recipient's dedication to WEAT, as exemplified during their term as WEAT President.

Alissa R. Lockett, P.E.

Alissa R. Lockett, P.E., has had an extensive and distinguished career in the water and wastewater industry, marked by a commitment to technical excellence, leadership, and public service.

Currently, she serves as the vice president of treatment operations at the San Antonio Water System. She has over 24 years of experience in the public and private sectors, specializing in treatment operations and engineering.

A native San Antonian, Lockett's passion for the wastewater industry began at a young age, sparked by visiting SAWS wastewater plants as the daughter of a noted, long-term industry expert, Charles Lockett. She earned her B.S. in civil and environmental engineering from Cornell University in 2002 and an MBA from the University of Texas at San Antonio in 2006. She is a registered professional engineer in Texas and holds a Texas "A" wastewater operator license.

Lockett worked as a consulting engineer from 2002 to 2009 at firms including Malcolm Pirnie, Tetra Tech and CDM Smith, Inc. She

joined SAWS in 2009, where she has held senior leadership and management roles, overseeing as many as 200 employees.

Since becoming vice president of treatment operations in March 2024, she has led the daily operations and maintenance of SAWS's three Water Recycling Centers (Medio Creek, Clouse, and Leon Creek), 142 lift stations, and all SAWS generators. A career highlight was leading the Vista Ridge Project Integration Program from 2018 to 2020, which involved a 48 MGD water treatment facility, a pump station, and four miles of water transmission main at a total cost of approximately \$200 million, successfully completing the largest new water supply project in SAWS history.

Lockett has demonstrated an unwavering commitment to the water community through her extensive involvement in professional organizations. She is the current president of the Water Environment Association of Texas, following her terms as president-elect in 2024 and vice president in 2023. Her service also includes

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being a past director-at-large on the American Water Works Association board and a past chair of the Texas Section AWWA. She served as co-chair for the Texas Water conference in both 2018 and 2022. Furthermore, she is a strong professional woman and role model who actively mentors new members and has worked with the Hill Country Section's Operator Engagement Committee to

provide continuing education credit to licensed operators. She received the WEAT President's Service Award in 2022 and the TAWWA Young Professionals Maverick Award in 2008. For her long tenure of service to WEAT, and especially her service as our 2025-2026 President, WEAT is proud to recognize her with the 2026 Outstanding Service Award.

WATER ENVIRONMENT FEDERATION

LABORATORY ANALYST EXCELLENCE AWARD

...recognizes an individual for outstanding performance, professionalism and contributions to the water quality analysis profession.

Michael Wurdack

Michael Wurdack is a laboratory technician for the Guadalupe-Blanco River Authority. Since joining GBRA in 2022, Wurdack has demonstrated a profound commitment to advancing laboratory science, with a particular focus on the complex challenge of nutrient loading. Wurdack's educational foundation, a Bachelor of Science in chemistry from the University of Texas San Antonio, equipped him with a strong background in spectrometry and chemical structure determination, including the use of advanced techniques like NMR, X-Ray crystallography, and mass spectrometry, which he has successfully translated into tangible improvements in environmental lab practices.

A major focus of Wurdack's tenure has been the critical issue of phosphorus analysis. As interest in nutrient loading—particularly from sources that lead to algal blooms and eutrophication in sensitive streams—grew, GBRA faced a noticeable lack of baseline data. This situation highlighted a need to achieve lower Limits of Quantitation for phosphorus. Initial efforts to reduce the LOQ were met with challenges. However, when Wurdack took over as the lead phosphorus analyst, he

expertly leveraged his professional chemistry skills and knowledge to implement a significantly lower phosphorus quantitation limit. This achievement has provided the laboratory with a new level of confidence in their low-level phosphorus data analysis. The success of his methodology has been recognized, leading Wurdack to share valuable information with several other laboratories across the state, assisting them in achieving similar critical results and enhancing overall industry capability.

Wurdack's efforts are integrated into a larger, multi-year sampling effort led by GBRA's environmental science staff. This comprehensive initiative is focused on the analysis and measurement of total phosphorus contributions from both engineered (e.g., wastewater treatment plants) and natural (e.g., agricultural runoff) sources along the Guadalupe River watershed.

Wurdack continues to develop new laboratory methods that can detect concentrations lower than what current typical methods measure. This new, highly sensitive methodology is vital for better understanding background concentrations of nutrients, which will ultimately inform and contribute to GBRA's comprehensive,

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multi-species Habitat Conservation Plan. This plan is a crucial program designed to address the complexities of water management while ensuring the conservation of both at-risk and endangered species under the Endangered Species Act, cementing Wurdack's work as essential to ecological stewardship.

“Michael has demonstrated great dedication and ingenuity during his time with us, successfully implementing a lower phosphorus quantitation limit that provides confidence in our low-level phosphorus data analysis,” says Kylie Gudgell, laboratory administrator at the GBRA Laboratory. “He has a genuine passion for chemistry, which he shows in his work every day, and he has the potential to make great contributions to our industry in the future.”

Eric Kong, P.E., senior project engineer at GBRA, further states, “Michael has exemplified GBRA's commitment of leading cooperative stewardship

of the water resources in the Guadalupe River watershed through his dedication in advancing laboratory science. Both GBRA and the residents of the Guadalupe-River watershed are appreciative of Michael's efforts in supporting the natural ecosystem and fostering responsible stewardship of our environment.”

Wurdack's unwavering dedication to advancing laboratory science, particularly in his work on low-level phosphorus detection, has been invaluable to the Guadalupe-Blanco River Authority. His technical expertise, passion for chemistry, and direct contribution to the region's environmental and conservation goals cement his reputation as an outstanding laboratory technician and a professional poised to make significant future contributions to the water quality industry. He is a deserved winner of WEAT and WEF's 2026 Laboratory Analyst Excellence Award.

WATER ENVIRONMENT FEDERATION

GEORGE W. BURKE, JR. AWARD

...recognizes municipal and industrial wastewater facilities for active and effective safety programs.

Trinity River Authority of Texas

Hydrogen sulfide, often referred to as the “silent killer,” remains one of the most serious occupational hazards in wastewater operations due to its acute toxicity, rapid onset of symptoms, and corrosive impacts on infrastructure. Recent fatalities and serious exposure incidents in wastewater system maintenance nationwide reinforce that H₂S risks persist despite established standards, particularly during confined space entries, biosolids handling, and process upsets. Against this backdrop, the Trinity River Authority implemented a comprehensive, Authority-wide Hydrogen Sulfide Risk Management Initiative that significantly strengthened employee protection, operational resilience, and infrastructure reliability.

The initiative began when leadership identified recurring employee exposure concerns in the biosolids processing areas at multiple treatment facilities. Rather than addressing these as isolated events, TRA elevated H₂S exposure to an organizational-level risk and launched a structured evaluation of sources, exposure pathways, and control gaps. A multidisciplinary team representing safety, operations, engineering, maintenance, and environmental functions was established to drive coordinated mitigation efforts. To support accountability and continuous improvement, all H₂S alarms and exposure events are reported through the Origami Risk Management system, enabling trend analysis, early identification of emerging risks, and validation of corrective actions.

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Consistent with the Hierarchy of Controls, TRA prioritized engineering solutions to reduce H₂S hazards at the source. Targeted corrosion and structural integrity inspections identified assets experiencing accelerated deterioration from chronic H₂S exposure. These findings directly informed leadership decisions to fast-track capital investments, including upgrades to deficient ventilation systems, repairs to corrosion-damaged work areas, and incorporation of corrosion-resistant materials into Capital Improvement Program projects. This approach transformed long-standing operational challenges into data-driven safety and infrastructure improvements.

TRA also expanded its H₂S monitoring strategy to reflect recent industry lessons learned, where short-duration, high-concentration releases have been the primary drivers of serious incidents. The authority deployed real-time H₂S monitors with data-logging capability, installed fixed monitors in high-risk areas to alert employees prior to entry, and applied dispersion modeling to account for H₂S accumulation in low-lying spaces. Baseline exposure sampling enabled a shift from reactive alarm response to proactive, predictive risk management.

Administrative and technological controls further reinforced hazard awareness. GIS-based mapping now identifies known high H₂S locations and system segments with potential structural vulnerabilities, improving situational awareness for field staff and planners. Standardized ANSI-compliant signage, tiered response protocols, and mass notification systems ensure consistent communication and timely decision-making during elevated H₂S conditions.

Finally, TRA developed tailored, in-house H₂S training and a formal Hydrogen Sulfide Program defining roles, exposure thresholds, PPE requirements, and emergency response expectations. Collectively, these efforts embedded H₂S safety into daily operations, reshaped organizational culture, and established a scalable, industry-leading program that reflects current risk trends while protecting workers, strengthening infrastructure, and setting a benchmark for wastewater utilities nationwide. WEAT is delighted to recognize this dedication to employee safety at an organizational level with the 2026 George W. Burke, Jr. Award.

WATER ENVIRONMENT ASSOCIATION OF TEXAS

MEDAL OF HONOR FOR HEROISM AWARD

...recognizes an individual from the State of Texas who has demonstrated exceptional courage and bravery in a single act of heroic behavior involving the water environment industry.

Joshua Cohron, CPWP-M.

It is with immense pleasure that we share the biography of Joshua Cohron, the public works manager at the City of Carrollton. Cohron has dedicated his career to service—both in uniform and in his community.

As an experienced public works professional, veteran, and skilled tradesman, he brings technical expertise, discipline, and calm leadership to every challenge. His actions reflect a deep commitment to protecting others, solving problems under

pressure, and answering the call when it matters most.

Cohron's daily work involves building and maintaining the vital infrastructure that ensures the safety and functionality of the community. However, his commitment extends far beyond the traditional scope of his job description.

He is a trained public works first responder and a basic life saver, a reflection of the strong partnership between Carrollton Public Works and

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Carrollton Fire Rescue. This collaborative approach ensures that the men and women of the Public Works Department are not only highly skilled tradespeople but also trained responders, ready to act decisively when safety and human life are in the balance.

The depth of this commitment was powerfully demonstrated on August 20, 2025. While traveling aboard American Airlines Flight 1290 from Chicago to Dallas-Fort Worth, an elderly passenger experienced a sudden, severe medical emergency due to the failure of their oxygen machine. When flight attendants requested medical assistance, Cohron stepped forward without hesitation. Drawing upon his first responder training, Cohron immediately began monitoring the patient's vital signs, administered high-flow oxygen, and provided a calm, reassuring presence that was critical in stabilizing the passenger's condition.

Cohron's quick thinking and professional skill ensured that the individual received immediate medical care. Furthermore, his decisive actions averted an emergency landing, allowing the flight to proceed safely to Dallas, where airport EMS personnel were waiting to provide advanced care. This incident is a powerful reflection of the identity of Public Works as true first responders.

Cohron's exemplary response to an emergency has been recognized by the City of Carrollton's and Carrollton Fire Rescue's Life Saving Award. His actions demonstrate that consistently doing the right thing can truly impact another person's life in an instant. His professional skill, unwavering dedication to public safety, and capacity for heroic action exemplify the highest standards of service. We are honored to recognize Joshua Cohron with WEAT's 2026 Medal of Honor for Heroism.

WATER ENVIRONMENT FEDERATION

WILLIAM D. HATFIELD AWARD

...recognizes an operator of wastewater treatment plants for outstanding performance and professionalism.

Eddie Carrillo

Eduardo "Eddie" Carrillo is the chief plant operator at the Gulf Coast Authority Bayport Facility. He began his career in operations at GCA in 1990 and has now dedicated over 35 years as a licensed employee. A member of both the Water Environment Association of Texas and the Water Environment Federation, he possesses a comprehensive skill set evidenced by his numerous credentials. Carrillo holds a current class "B" wastewater treatment operator license, a class "C" groundwater treatment operator license, and is also a licensed potable water operator.

In his role as chief plant operator, Carrillo expertly leads, oversees, and manages various levels of plant operation personnel at the 35 MGD Bayport Industrial Wastewater Treatment Facility. He serves as the chief operator of a crucial 24-hour rotating shift operation, where his

leadership and professionalism are paramount. His dedication to maintaining excellence is reflected in his active participation as an integral part of coordinating multiple facility projects alongside the maintenance, operations, and compliance supervisors.

Furthermore, Carrillo also serves as the interim back-up for the operations supervisor, showcasing his versatility and critical dependability within GCA. Throughout his extensive tenure, he has consistently commanded the professional respect of his peers, his staff, and several leaders in the industry.

Carrillo is actively engaged in compliance and regulatory issues, ensuring the facility adheres to all necessary standards. He regularly participates in meetings and communications with industrial and

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municipal customers, ensuring the dissemination of information regarding advancements in the field to his operations group and superiors. Beyond his core duties, he is a dedicated leader in advocating public outreach education, frequently participating in Bayport Plant tours with various groups to inform the public about wastewater treatment.

Carrillo’s most profound contribution to the sector is his commitment to preparing future generations of wastewater operators. He takes the time to thoroughly train, develop, advise, and mentor his team, ensuring they are equipped to handle any situation. He inspires a high standard in others and ensures operational excellence for years to come—when his team shines, it is a direct reflection of his leadership.

The younger operators consistently look to Carrillo as a true role model. Supported by his bilingual

capabilities, he is happy to share operational knowledge, history, and just about any subject matter with others both within and outside of GCA.

His commitment is a true reflection of determination and dedication to the absolute commitment of protecting the waters of the State of Texas through environmentally sound, economically feasible, and technologically advanced wastewater and water management practices.

For his outstanding performance, professional contributions, and invaluable knowledge that has helped connect operations, safety, maintenance, and compliance over his remarkable career, WEAT is proud to recognize him as our 2026 William D. Hatfield Awardee.

**WATER ENVIRONMENT ASSOCIATION OF TEXAS
WILLIAM D. HATFIELD AWARD WINNERS**

1958	A. L. Allison	1983	Basil S. Housewright, Jr.	2006	John Bennett
1959	W.N. Wells	1984	Robert T. McMillon	2007	Edmund R. Mach
1961	Haskell R. Street	1985	Kenneth R. Jackson	2008	Orren West
1962	Cecil H. Williams	1986	Joe G. Taylor	2009	Gurdip S. Hyare
1963	Mansel Smith	1987	Donald D. Spurrier	2010	Clifford W. Beaber
1965	James D. Goff	1988	Wesley N. MacKenzie	2011	Frederick R. Moore
1967	J. Les Robinson	1989	Lynn Norton	2012	Gary LaGassey
1968	Robert E. Derrington	1990	Curtis L. Smalley	2013	Larry Rowe
1969	Leo Wood	1991	Teresa Battenfield	2014	Jerry Pressley
1970	C.H. Schere	1992	William T. Manning	2015	Tim Morgan
1971	W. E. Gibson	1993	Gary W. Burton	2016	Ben Hodges
1972	Albert Breaux	1994	Olga Rodriguez	2017	Sterling Lee
1973	S.A. Webb	1995	Enrique Woo	2018	Clifford Creeks
1974	George H. Powell	1996	David Mask	2019	Lance Philips
1975	Foster Crowell	1997	Oscar Guerrero	2020	Rey Davila
1976	Joe P. Teller	1998	Alfonso Carmona	2021	Dynnie Mitchell
1977	M. Truett Garrett, Jr.	1999	Stephen Hodge	2022	LaTia Jutan
1978	Charles Ganze	2000	David Hackley	2023	Dow J. “Jody” Zabolio
1979	M. Dolan McKnight	2001	Robert A. Rowell	2024	Greg Seay
1980	Martin J. Manning	2002	William Lewis (Bill) Tatum	2025	Scott Koerber
1981	Octavio A. Ramirez	2003	Meg Conner		
1982	W. W. Right	2005	Michael A. Young		

WATER ENVIRONMENT ASSOCIATION OF TEXAS

ENGINEER OF THE YEAR AWARD

... recognizes an individual who exemplifies the leadership, professionalism, and technical excellence that define the industry's highest standards.

Martin Noriega, P.E.

Martin Noriega, P.E., is the utility chief operations officer - water & wastewater systems for El Paso Water, overseeing all the utility's water and wastewater treatment, production, and distribution systems. Over his long career, Noriega has demonstrated exceptional professionalism, technical excellence, and a strong, service-driven commitment to public service and the water and wastewater industry. His people-centered leadership and deep engineering expertise have been instrumental in strengthening operational performance, efficiency, and sustainability across multiple critical divisions.

Noriega began his career with eight years of service in the United States Air Force (1988–1996) as a water and wastewater plant operator. He joined El Paso Water in 1997 as a well production field operator. Following his graduation from the University of Texas at El Paso in 2003, he spent eight years in the City Engineering Department, focusing on construction, project management, and floodplain management.

He returned to EPWater in late 2010 as a utility engineer and quickly advanced to stormwater operations manager. In subsequent roles, including division manager and his current position as chief of operations, he took on added responsibilities for fleet maintenance, building maintenance, and

heavy equipment, while leading critical efforts to modernize the El Paso community's water and wastewater systems and enhance their resilience.

A licensed professional engineer and a U.S. Air Force veteran, Noriega holds four degrees from the University of Texas at El Paso: a B.S. in civil engineering, an M.S. in construction management, an M.S. in civil/environmental engineering (Water Resources Engineering Management), and an M.A. in Leadership studies. He is also currently a doctorate candidate in UTEP's Educational Doctorate Program in Leadership and Administration.

Beyond his professional role, Noriega is an active member and contributor to several professional organizations, including ASCE, TSPE, AWWA, and WEAT local chapters. He is deeply engaged in community service through El Paso Water's Charity of Choice program, where he has organized the annual volleyball tournament for over a decade to raise funds for local nonprofits.

His technical expertise, collaborative leadership, and unwavering dedication to service and community engagement reflect the excellence and standards of the profession. These qualities make him a deserving recipient of the 2026 WEAT Engineer of the Year Award.

Women Of Water Breakfast

Wednesday, April 29, 7:15 a.m. to 9 a.m.

Hemisphere Ballroom C1-2

Ticket Required

WATER ENVIRONMENT FEDERATION

LIFE MEMBERSHIP AWARDS

...recognizes individuals who have been a member of WEF for 35 or more consecutive years, and are of the age 65 or older.

Warren C. Davis Jr.
Ronald Emmons

Kerry Hogan
Ron Horne

Todd W. Reck

WATER ENVIRONMENT ASSOCIATION OF TEXAS

CLEAN WATER ACHIEVEMENT AWARD

...recognizes the commitment and steadfastness by a clean water professional over the course of their career.

Joseph G. Majdalani, Ph.D., P.E., CFM

With over four decades of dedicated leadership and engineering expertise, Joseph G. Majdalani, Ph.D., P.E., CFM, is a recognized leader in the clean water sector, particularly in the management of wastewater operations and water pollution control. His career demonstrates sustained achievement and professional commitment.

Majdalani is a senior civil structural engineer with Alliance Engineers and Product Consultants in Beaumont. He previously served as the senior assistant director of wastewater operations for Houston Public Works, where he oversaw one of the largest and most complex wastewater systems in the nation, ensuring compliance and operational excellence for the 2.2 million customers served by Houston Water.

Prior to this, his extensive experience includes key leadership positions such as the director of public works for the City of Beaumont and significant roles at the Jefferson County Drainage District No. 6. Through these roles, he has been instrumental in managing large-scale collection systems, implementing capital improvement plans, and navigating complex regulatory environments, all of which directly contribute to enhanced public health and cleaner waterways.

A highly credentialed professional, Majdalani possesses a Doctor of Engineering degree from Lamar University, complementing his Bachelor of Science and Master of Science degrees in civil engineering. He is a registered professional engineer in Texas, Louisiana, and California, and holds certification as a certified floodplain manager in Texas.

This academic and professional foundation has enabled him to excel as both a practitioner and an educator, having served as a member of the graduate faculty at Lamar University.

His significant contributions have been formally recognized by his peers. Most notably, Majdalani is the recipient of the Water Environment Association of Texas Winfield S. Mahlie Award. This prestigious honor is given to an individual who has made “significant contributions to the art and science of wastewater treatment and water pollution control,” emphatically underscoring his lasting impact on the field and his commitment to WEAT’s mission.

Further demonstrating his professional stature, he has been honored with the Texas Society of Professional Engineers Engineer of the Year and

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the Gulf Coast Trenchless Association's Most Valuable Professional (MVP) Award.

As a renowned speaker, he is frequently invited to share his deep technical knowledge and management insights. He has made numerous presentations at major industry events, including the annual EPA Region 6 CMOM Workshop

since 2006. Majdalani's dedication to mentoring, compliance, and operational best practices in the water environment continues to solidify his legacy as a leader shaping the future of wastewater management, and WEAT is proud to recognize this legacy with our 2026 Clean Water Achievement Award.

WATER ENVIRONMENT ASSOCIATION OF TEXAS

CLEAN WATER LEADERSHIP AWARD

...recognizes individuals whose exemplary leadership, unwavering commitment to excellence, and ability to inspire and influence their peers sets a standard of excellence within the field.

Angel Leon

Angel Leon is a mechanical engineer with more than four decades of experience in infrastructure development, manufacturing, and municipal wastewater systems. He holds a mechanical engineering degree from La Salle University in Mexico City and has led projects spanning international trade, manufacturing, and large-scale public infrastructure.

After relocating to Laredo, Texas in 1981, Leon managed the U.S. operations of an international manufacturing firm before founding his own company in 1985. In 1995, he established a fiberglass manufacturing plant where he designed, produced, and marketed tanks for residential wastewater treatment systems throughout Mexico, combining engineering design with hands-on manufacturing and quality control.

In 2007, Leon joined the City of Laredo, where he later became wastewater collection superintendent following a departmental reorganization in 2012. In this role, he was responsible for the planning, design, and construction oversight of the wastewater collection system, managing an annual capital and maintenance program of approximately \$15 million. His tenure included the rehabilitation of several miles of aging wastewater lines, the

redesign and reconstruction of most of the system's lift stations, and the implementation of an aggressive, system-wide manhole rehabilitation program focused on extending asset life and improving system performance.

Throughout his career, Leon has worked closely with consulting engineers, contractors, manufacturers, and municipal staff to deliver complex infrastructure projects from planning through construction. His experience combines design, constructability, operations, and long-term asset management, providing practical insight into how infrastructure is built, maintained, and sustained over time.

Leon received the Sidney Allison Award from WEAT in 2022 and served as president of the South Texas Chapter of the Underground Construction Technology Association, and as a member of the WEAT Collections Committee. He holds a TCEQ wastewater collection III and wastewater treatment C license, is NASSCO certified, and holds the BAMI-I CTAM (certified in asset management) credential. WEAT is proud to recognize his decades of service to the clean water sector with the 2026 Clean Water Leadership Award.

WATER ENVIRONMENT ASSOCIATION OF TEXAS

WINFIELD S. MAHLIE AWARD

...recognizes a member of WEAT who has made significant contributions to the art and science of wastewater treatment and water pollution control.

Chad Kopecki, P.E.

Chad Kopecki is the senior engineer at the Dallas Central Wastewater Treatment Plant, a role he has held for over eight years. With more than 23 years of experience at the City of Dallas, Kopecki has managed and supported numerous capital, public works, and plant projects for Dallas Water Utilities (DWU). He holds both a bachelor's and master's degree in civil engineering from Texas A&M University and is a registered professional engineer.

In his role as senior engineer at CWWTP, Kopecki has led efforts in capital project monitoring, instrumentation upgrades, Six Sigma initiatives, and laboratory data management. He played a major role in the CWWTP Master Plan, Major Maintenance Rehabilitation Program, and the non-potable water loop and pump station improvements, where he demonstrated his ability to coordinate across many city divisions.

Kopecki is recognized for integrating operations with engineering design to improve system performance, implementing practical improvements such as installing auto flushers to enhance reuse water quality, launching an E. coli DNA testing pilot, and analyzing activated sludge data. He also created and manages the plant's

SharePoint site and maintains an easy-to-access Google Earth KMZ map of key yard piping, which significantly improves access to project and field information.

Kopecki actively supports professional development and service to the water industry. He mentors two engineers through the WEAT Mentorship Program and serves on the WEAT Workforce Development Committee. He has been published in Texas WET, regularly presents at WEAT events and also presented at the 2025 AWWA Utility Management Conference. Within DWU, he is known among his colleagues for writing award and presentation profiles and helps staff develop resumes and public engagement materials.

Chad Kopecki's significant and ongoing contributions to wastewater treatment performance and operations at CWWTP have established a benchmark for integrating engineering design with operational excellence. His results-driven approach, commitment to innovation, and service to the profession have left an indelible mark on the Dallas water sector. For his work, he is WEAT's 2026 Winfield S. Mahlie Awardee.

Fastest Saw Cut Competition

Exhibit Hall, Ops Challenge Area

3:30 p.m. to 5 p.m.

Tuesday, April 28

WATER ENVIRONMENT ASSOCIATION OF TEXAS

W. WALTER CHIANG LIFETIME ACHIEVEMENT AWARD

...recognizes a current or past WEAT member who has demonstrated continual and tireless contributions toward the improvement of the water environment throughout a long, distinguished career in the wastewater treatment industry and in WEAT and WEF.

Jeffrey Haby, P.E.

Jeffrey Haby, P.E., recently retired as senior vice president of production & treatment operations at the San Antonio Water System in December 2025, at the end of a 38-year engineering career, 28 of which were dedicated to SAWS. Within SAWS and the broader Texas water sector, Haby is celebrated as a mentor, a friend, an incredibly knowledgeable engineer, and a thoughtful and humble leader. He is known for his commitment to sharing gratitude and boosting morale, embodying a natural leadership style with tireless dedication to both the SAWS mission of sustainable, affordable water services and the WEAT mission of protecting and enhancing the environment.

Haby is a native San Antonioan, with family roots in the area dating back to the 1840s. Raised in a working-class family on the northwest side of the city, he graduated from Oliver Wendell Holmes High School in 1982. During his time in high school, he excelled both academically, graduating fifth in a class of 650 students, and athletically, as a starting member of the varsity football team for three years. This diverse high school environment allowed him to build friendships across socio-economic and racial lines, relationships he still cherishes today.

After high school, Haby attended Texas A&M University, drawn by the engineering curriculum and the initial opportunity to play football, although an injury ended his football career shortly after he enrolled. He majored in civil engineering and participated in the Cooperative Education Program with ARCO Oil and Gas Company, enabling him to fund his education by alternating semesters between work and school. He was the

first person in his family to earn a 4-year college degree when he graduated in May 1987.

He began his engineering career with Burns and McDonnell, where he gained professional growth through mentorship, before taking a leave of absence to pursue a graduate degree focused on environmental engineering. Haby eventually returned to San Antonio and began his long and impactful tenure at SAWS.

In his final role as senior vice president of production & treatment operations, Haby oversaw nearly 300 employees responsible for ensuring potable water service for two million people and environmentally responsible wastewater treatment.

His wide-ranging responsibilities over the years included water production operations and maintenance, wastewater treatment and recycled water operations and maintenance, non-revenue water programs, asset management, and successfully leading SAWS through nearly ten years of an EPA Consent Decree. His commitment to operational excellence included chilled water operations and maintenance, lift station operations and maintenance, and predictive maintenance. Mr. Haby is a registered professional engineer in Texas and Missouri and holds an "A" Water Operator license in Texas.

His service to WEAT is extraordinary. As far back as 1996, Haby co-founded the San Antonio WEAT Section to foster local idea-sharing and networking. Since then, he has participated at the local, state, and national levels, sharing his broad knowledge in water and wastewater through well over 100 presentations throughout his career. His

(Continued)

recent service to WEAT includes chairing the Texas Water 2022 Local Host Committee, where he ensured SAWS provided critical support, leading to one of the conference's biggest and best years.

He has served on the WEAT Executive Board as a member-at-large, and with the WEAT Section Engagement and Advanced Operator Training Committees. Notably, he won the fastest saw cut competition at the Texas Water 2022 Operations Challenge, proving he still embraces a hands-on, competitive spirit.

Haby holds bachelor's and master's degrees in civil engineering from Texas A&M University.

He is a member of the American Society of Civil Engineers, American Water Works Association, Water Environment Federation, and a board member of the South Texas Underground Construction Technology Association.

For his exemplary career and attitude towards servant leadership, which always prefers to highlight his team over himself, we are honored to recognize the indelible mark Jeff Haby has made on the Texas clean water sector. He is our deserved 2026 Walter Chiang Lifetime Achievement Awardee.

WATER ENVIRONMENT ASSOCIATION OF TEXAS

EARNEST F. GLOYNA PILLARS OF THE PROFESSION AWARD

...recognizes an individual with a long and distinguished career in the wastewater treatment or the water quality industry who has demonstrated meaningful and substantial contributions toward the improvement of the water environment and who has a positive impact on the success and growth of WEAT.

Louis C. Herrin, III, P.E.

Louis C. Herrin, III, P.E., has left an indelible mark on wastewater treatment in Texas through nearly five decades of exemplary service. A registered professional engineer in the state of Texas, Herrin graduated from Texas A&M University in December 1980 with a Bachelor of Science in civil engineering. He began his 44-year tenure with the Texas Department of Water Resources in February 1981, a regulatory agency that later became the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality, where he was a steadfast presence until his retirement in August 2025.

Herrin's work at the agency exemplified his dedication to public stewardship and protecting the state's waters. As a regulator, he was the steadfast guardian of rigorous, fair, and technically sound wastewater permit reviews. His contributions include drafting thousands of treated effluent discharge permits for municipalities, industries,

and agricultural operations (over 1,000 for the latter). He also testified as an expert witness in over a hundred public hearings and in state and federal courts for the commission.

He held numerous critical roles within the TCEQ's Water Quality Division:

- Division engineer: A role he served in since 1990.
- Wastewater programs lead: In 1994, he took over responsibility for the TCEQ's domestic wastewater plans and specifications and the state domestic water reuse programs.
- Program coordinator: He started the domestic wastewater sludge program for TCEQ in 1992 and served as Homeland Security Coordinator and Innovative Technologies Coordinator for the Water Quality Division.

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Herrin was the lead for several major rule packages that form the foundation of Texas water quality regulation:

- Chapter 217 (Design Criteria for Wastewater Systems): He worked tirelessly for 13 years (1994 to 2007) to completely rewrite this chapter, leading to its completion and subsequent revisions.
- Chapter 210 (Use of Reclaimed Water): He initiated and drafted the first-ever rules for the use of reclaimed water in Texas, and his monumental efforts have made Texas one of the leading states in the nation for water reuse.
- Chapter 312 (Sludge Use, Disposal, and Transportation).

Beyond his regulatory work, Herrin was an unwavering champion of the Water Environment Association of Texas. He is an active member who has served the association directly and through his

work has supported our clean water mission. He traveled the state to deliver authoritative regulatory updates and presentations at numerous Texas Water conferences, WEAT chapter meetings, and specialty conferences. More importantly, he actively mentored younger professionals, patiently answering questions, and building relationships that strengthened the WEAT community. His legacy of influence in the profession is considered by many to be his greatest contribution.

For his extraordinary dedication, Herrin has been the recipient of multiple awards, including the WEAT Outstanding Public Official Award, the Winfield S. Mahlie Award, and the WateReuse Texas's Advocacy Achievement Award.

For his extraordinary contributions to the Texas water community, his lifelong dedication, and his enduring impact on the profession, he is truly an industry pillar and most deserving of the Earnest Gloyna Pillars of the Profession Award.

Water for People Silent Auction

Use the Handbid app

Bidding ends at 1:15 p.m. Wednesday

WATER ENVIRONMENT FEDERATION
ARTHUR SIDNEY BEDELL AWARD

...acknowledges extraordinary personal service to the Water Environment Association of Texas.

Dylan Christenson, Ph.D., P.E.

Dylan Christenson, Ph.D., P.E., is the Texas wastewater treatment business development leader at Garver and a leading expert in biological wastewater treatment. He has noted professional expertise in biofilm treatment technologies, nutrient removal, wastewater reuse, anaerobic digestion, energy analysis, and greenhouse gas assessments.

He has a Ph.D. and a master's degree in civil engineering, both from Texas Tech University. Further demonstrating his commitment to education, he also holds a Master of Arts in education and a Bachelor of Arts in liberal studies, mathematics from Vanguard University of Southern California.

His dedication to the water environment began during his time as a student member of WEAT at Texas Tech University. Since then, he has taken on various leadership roles that have significantly shaped the organization. His involvement has spanned the Municipal Resource Recovery and Design Committee, the Eckenfelder Lecture Series, the Workforce Development Committee, and the Southeast Section Board.

His commitment culminated in his role as WEAT president 2024-2025, he is currently completing his term as WEAT past president and chair of the Committee Leadership Council.

Christenson has been a driving force behind WEAT's numerous workforce initiatives, including the current development of a basic wastewater high school video course. This innovative course aims to make students across the state eligible for their D license upon graduation, building the next generation of water professionals. During his term as WEAT president, the association gained several

new utility members through membership drives and President-initiated events across the state, from El Paso to Lubbock and everywhere in between.

Beyond his direct work in wastewater treatment, Christenson is deeply passionate about sustainability and innovation in nutrient, energy, and water recovery. He is a fierce advocate for outreach and education initiatives, both within Texas and at the national level, focusing on building the workforce of the future. He is proud to have served alongside so many wonderful leaders in WEAT and is profoundly thankful for the rich friendship and mentorship given to him by his WEAT water family along the way.

Outside of his professional life, Christenson exemplifies service through his volunteer work with his church and his boys' schools. He is a devoted assistant coach for his sons' athletic endeavors. Furthermore, he serves as an advocate for Water Mission, an organization that builds sustainable safe water solutions for people in developing countries, refugee camps, and disaster areas.

Given a bit of free time, Christenson loves to be outdoors with his wife, three boys, and the family dog, reading a good book, or creating an "edible mess" in the kitchen. He is thankful for the incredible support of his family, stating he would never have made it this far without them. Christenson feels blessed to have a life filled with the real privilege of getting to do interesting work with great people.

WEAT is honored to recognize Dylan Christenson's extraordinary personal service and dedication by presenting him with the 2026 WEF-WEAT Arthur Sidney Bedell Award.

The list of previous Bedell Award winners is on the next page.

**WATER ENVIRONMENT ASSOCIATION OF TEXAS
ARTHUR SIDNEY BEDELL AWARD WINNERS**

1949 Victor Marcus Ehlers	1981 Robert L. Nichols	2004 Cathy Henderson
1952 Winfield S. Mahlie	1982 P. D. Parks	2005 Raymond R. Longoria
1955 J. H. Sorrels	1983 Dick Whittington	2006 Jim Taafe
1958 Roger Moehlman	1984 Joseph F. Malins, Jr.	2007 Carolyn Ahrens Wieland
1959 C. H. Connell	1985 Marshall L. Haney	2008 Richard Eason
1961 A. C. Bryan	1986 Sharon D'Orsie	2009 Carol Batterton
1963 David F. Smallhorst	1987 Bert H. Bates, Jr.	2010 Brad Castleberry
1964 David G. Chase	1988 William Goloby	2011 John Bennett
1965 John P. Wold	1989 Rhonda Harris	2012 Ronald Dale Carlson
1967 Albert H. Ullrich	1990 Earnest F. Gloyna	2013 Jody Zabolio
1968 G. R. Herzik, Jr.	1991 Stephen M. Jenkins	2014 Dawn Anderson
1969 Pearl Goodwin	1992 Robert T. McMillon	2015 David Briggs
1970 Jack E. Huppert	1993 Ron L. Mayo	2016 Julie Nahrgang
1971 Sam L. Warrington	1994 Paul Roach	2017 Jenna Covington
1972 Clayton H. Billings	1995 Joe King II	2018 Jeffrey L. Sober
1973 Joe Driskell	1996 Patricia M. Cleveland	2019 Steve Coonan
1974 Joe P. Teller	1997 Foster Crowell	2020 David Jackson
1975 J. L. Robinson	1998 Raj Bhattarai	2021 Leigh Thomas
1976 John B. Scott	1999 Alan Plummer	2022 Rick Hidalgo
1977 A. E. Holcomb	2000 Ron Sieger	2023 Jeff Haby
1978 Ernest F. Cross	2001 Betty Jordon	2024 Heather Cooke
1979 W. S. Sam Hutton	2002 Betty Carol Mayo	2025 Jeff Caffey
1980 S. A. Garza	2003 Mary Evans	

**Water Environment Association of Texas
Competitions**

- **Operations Challenge (Tuesday & Wednesday)**
 - **Process Control**
 - **Laboratory**
 - **Pump Maintenance**
 - **Safety**
 - **Collection System**
 - **Electrical**
 - **Exhibition**

*The awards ceremony is at 2:45 p.m. Thursday in the Convention Center,
Hemisphere Ballroom, C1-2*

TEXAS SECTION - AMERICAN WATER WORKS ASSOCIATION

YOUNG PROFESSIONALS MAVERICK AWARD

...recognizes an individual member age 35 or younger who exemplifies exceptional qualities in the areas of volunteerism, community involvement, leadership, and outstanding service in the science of water supply, treatment, operations, and quality.

Anissa Calamaco

Anissa Calamaco is an emerging leader whose dedication to volunteerism, leadership, and service has made a significant impact on Texas AWWA and the Texas water industry. Since November 2023, she has demonstrated exceptional initiative as the young professionals chair for the South Texas Chapter.

In her professional role as a water and wastewater engineering specialist at STV, Inc., Calamaco contributes to improving water quality and strengthening critical infrastructure across the state.

As YP chair, Calamaco revitalized the South Texas Chapter YP Committee, expanding engagement through programs centered on professional development, connection, and inclusion. She has coordinated and supported numerous chapter initiatives, including the Brad Groves Bowling Bingo Social, the YP Volleyball Tournament,

and the annual scholarship fundraiser, where she contributed to event planning and décor.

She also leads the signs committee for the chapter's annual Water for People Golf Tournament. Her service extends to volunteering at conferences and environmental stewardship events such as the annual Basura Bash.

Calamaco has strengthened collaboration across the industry by supporting joint initiatives between Texas AWWA and partner organizations, including the Water Environment Association of Texas and the Environmental & Water Resources Institute. She is actively involved in the planning and promotion of Texas Water 2026 and the inaugural Texas YP Summit.

Her dedication to service, collaboration, and leadership exemplifies the spirit of the Young Professionals Maverick Award.

**TEXAS SECTION-AMERICAN WATER WORKS ASSOCIATION
YOUNG PROFESSIONALS MAVERICK AWARD WINNERS**

2003	Shay Ralls	2011	Melissa Bryant	2021	Katie McNeal
2004	Matt Berg	2012	Adam Conner	2022	Michael McBee
2005	Bobby Mengdon	2013	James Mansfield	2023	Varenya Mehta
2006	Marissa Vergara	2014	Letty Gomar	2022	Michael McBee
2007	Jason Christensen	2017	Jason Niemeier	2023	Varenya Mehta
2008	Alissa Lockett	2018	Theresa Pedrazas	2024	Nabeel Khan
2009	Jerry Snead	2019	Lizanne Douglas	2025	Alison Kwong
2010	Chris Varnon	2020	Katie Stowers		

AMERICAN WATER WORKS ASSOCIATION

OPERATOR MERITORIOUS SERVICE AWARD NOMINEE

...recognizes individuals for continuous compliance with all public health standards in treated drinking water; consistent and outstanding contribution to plant maintenance; developing new or modified equipment or significant process modifications to provide for more efficient or effective treatment; special efforts in the training of treatment plant operators; special acts which demonstrate dedication to the public beyond the normal operating responsibilities, and consistent and outstanding contribution to operation or maintenance of distribution lines, pump stations and reservoirs.

Jesus Acosta

Jesus Acosta is a class A licensed water operator with more than 20 years of experience in field water production, conventional water treatment plant operations, and reverse osmosis plant operations. His current experience includes oversight and operation of 54 booster stations, 82 potable water storage tanks, and 122 freshwater production wells.

He oversees 10 RO units, four concentrate Enhanced Recovery Reverse Osmosis units, and three arsenic treatment facilities. Additionally, he manages six reclaim booster stations, as well as two El Paso County booster stations and three El Paso County storage tanks.

Acosta's background also includes overseeing & operation of the Esperanza water system, consisting of two wells, one RO unit, one well storage tank, and 10 potable storage tanks. Along

with this, Acosta also oversees a central control center that monitors water tanks, booster stations, well and water plants finished water to the system for the City of El Paso.

Acosta has consistently met, maintained, and exceeded all public finished water health standard established by the TCEQ across all areas of plant operations and water production. While assigned to the water operations section, he supported operations at the Jonathan Rogers Water Treatment Plant, which consistently receives multiple AWWA Annual Partnership for Safe Drinking Water awards, as well as at the Kay Bailey Hutchison

Desalination Plant, a facility recognized with multiple SCMA Membrane Plant of the Year awards.

As a devoted family man, Acosta dedicates quality time to his sons, engaging in outdoor activities and participating in community outreach initiatives. Acosta collaborates effectively with plant/field personnel, supervisors, managers, engineers, project managers, and general contractors, fostering strong working relationships across all levels. He consistently ensures that tasks and projects are completed efficiently and within established timelines.

Committed to maintaining high professional standards, he holds himself accountable and takes full responsibility for water supply and distribution, maintenance activities, and staff performance. Acosta demonstrates strong determination and accountability in supervising daily water production and supply operations, optimizing system output while ensuring all water quality and safety standards are consistently met.

Jesus holds a Texas class A water operator license, He supports employee training in water treatment operations, helping staff prepare for TCEQ licensing exams, and continues to mentor and develop plant technicians.

Acosta is a member of the South-Central Membrane Association and the American Water Works Association.

AMERICAN WATER WORKS ASSOCIATION

WENDELL LADUE UTILITY SAFETY AWARD NOMINEE

...to recognize distinguished water utility safety programs.

Gulf Coast Water Authority

Commitment, involvement, and accountability for safety and health practices are demonstrated at the Gulf Coast Water Authority through leadership participation, employee engagement, recognition programs, and consistent enforcement of safety expectations across all levels of management.

Management at GCWA actively involves workers in the safety and health effort by encouraging participation in hazard identification, safety meetings, training development, and safety program feedback. Employees are viewed as key contributors to maintaining a safe workplace, and management promotes open communication and involvement at all levels.

One primary way workers are involved is through participating in safety observations and near miss reporting. Employees are trained and encouraged to identify hazards, unsafe conditions, and potential risks before they result in an incident. Management reviews the reports, communicates findings company-wide, and implements corrective actions, reinforcing that employee input directly contributes to improving workplace safety.

Employees participate in the Employee Safety Advisory Committee, where staff members discuss safety concerns, review incidents, and recommend improvements to policies and procedures. This committee allows employees to have a direct voice in shaping safety initiatives and promotes collaboration between management and staff.

GCWA also involves workers through tailgate safety meetings and job hazard analysis discussions, where employees are encouraged to identify potential job risks, share experiences, and recommend safer work practices before tasks begin. Supervisors and managers use this feedback to adjust procedures and improve training.

Additionally, employees volunteer to present Safety Moments during executive and departmental meetings. These presentations allow staff to share relatable, real-world safety topics and demonstrate how safety applies to daily operations. This involvement helps build ownership and accountability for safety throughout the organization.

Management seeks employee feedback when developing or updating training programs, emergency response plans, and safety procedures. Employees' hands-on experience helps ensure training and policies remain practical, effective, and relevant to job-specific tasks. Through these efforts, GCWA fosters a collaborative safety culture where employees are encouraged to actively participate, provide feedback, and contribute to continuous improvement in workplace safety and health.

By training staff to proactively identify hazards and report potential risks, GCWA has significantly enhanced hazard awareness and engagement—all while maintaining a record of zero incidents.

This initiative reinforces that safety is a shared responsibility, empowers employees to speak up, and strengthens trust between staff and the Safety Department. Upper and executive management make it clear that all safety procedures and guidelines are to be followed without exception, fostering a culture of accountability while providing support and coaching.

As a result of this proactive approach, hazard reporting increased by 28%, rising from 115 observations in FY 2024 to 149 in FY 2025. During the same period, incidents decreased from 22 to 9—a 60% reduction—while recordable incidents remained at zero.

AMERICAN WATER WORKS ASSOCIATION

FIVE UNDER 35 NOMINEES

...recognizes and honor young professional members of AWWA who have demonstrated outstanding service to their Section or Association through leadership and active participation in AWWA YP programs.

Susana Blauser Gonzalez

Alison Kwong

Varenya Mehta

Susana Blauser Gonzalez

Susana Blauser Gonzalez exemplifies leadership, dedication, and vision in advancing Young Professionals, diversity and inclusion, and women in the water industry. Through her initiatives, mentorship, and industry collaborations, she has created lasting impact while balancing her career and motherhood.

When Susana joined Brown and Caldwell, she broadened her focus to uniting professionals across companies and disciplines to improve the water industry. In March 2023, she joined the Southeast Chapter of the Texas American Water Works Association (TAWWA) as Sponsorship Co-Chair. In this role, she contributed to nearly every major chapter event, demonstrating exceptional organizational skills, dedication, and collaborative spirit.

Her leadership and vision reached new heights in July 2024 when she, along with Xi Zhao and JoAnne Salera, founded the Women in Water committee and later recruited Morgan Early and Yvonne Rivera. Recognizing a need for connection and mentorship among women in the industry, the committee began hosting bimonthly lunches for 25 women, which sold out within hours. By popular demand, the capacity was doubled to 50—yet still reached capacity almost immediately. Building on this success, Susana spearheaded the inaugural Women in Water Luncheon, a landmark event featuring City of Houston trailblazer Johana Clark, who inspired attendees to embrace confidence and leadership.

As her involvement in TAWWA expanded, so did her role at Brown and Caldwell. After three years, Susana became the Houston Local Leader and Client Service Manager for the Houston area—continuing to lead with purpose and vision.

Susana's professional achievements are impressive on their own, but even more remarkable is that she has accomplished all of this while being a devoted young mother to two boys, now ages 7 and 4. Her ability to balance leadership, professional growth, and family life is a testament to her resilience, dedication, and passion for uplifting others.

For her sustained commitment to the advancement of young professionals, her pioneering work in creating opportunities for women in the water industry, and her inspiring example as a leader and mentor, the Texas Section AWWA is honored to nominate Susana Blauser Gonzales for this award.

Alison Kwong

Alison Kwong has been involved in Texas AWWA since joining the water industry in 2018 as a graphic designer at environmental firm CDM Smith. She volunteered at lake cleanups with the YP Committee of Capital Area Chapter in Austin, then joined other chapter events, such as the Education Committee's annual STEM Girl Day at the University of Texas at Austin and the Networking and Membership Committee's annual Joint Member Appreciation Social. As a participant and volunteer, she brought visibility to the chapter through her enthusiastic photo-filled LinkedIn posts. During this time, she helped

(Continued)

form the popular YP Monster Trash Bash Kayak Cleanup, now in its fifth year, which combines a costume contest with trash collecting; the friendly competition cleared 120 lbs of trash from Lady Bird Lake in 2024!

In 2022, she stepped into a leadership role as the YP co-chair, serving with Lorraine Liu. They led a committee of 15- 30 YPs to plan events every other month, coordinating with other committees to help out, including the Education Committee's STEM outreach.

As a marketer and amateur photographer, Kwong has a keen eye for communicating and capturing moments, skills she used to promote the chapter and encourage membership. Proof of her involvement in the chapter is seen all over the bimonthly chapter newsletter and LinkedIn page, as well as the chapter YP Committee page that she maintained on the TAWWA website, a model for other chapters.

She is also an active participant in executive meetings, starting the chapter's Google Drive to better coordinate chapter activities, document organization, and material resources, as well as updating presentation templates and improving chapter standards.

Kwong attended her first Texas Water in 2022, the largest regional water conference, held by TAWWA and Water Environment Association of Texas. She connected with TAWWA members across the state. Every year since, she participates in Texas Water in some way, from connecting YPs to opportunities, to marketing the conference, to serving as an unofficial photographer and YP presenter cheerleader.

Since her appointment as the Texas Section YP chair in mid-2024, Kwong has coordinated review of Texas Water YP abstracts, led the YP Committee meeting at Texas Water (inviting Chelsea Boozer of AWWA and Stephen Sanders of WEAT), and connected the chapter YP chairs with a new

quarterly meeting. Of note, she is developing a new Texas YP Summit with WEAT YP Chair Eric Kong, inspired by the 2025 AWWA/WEF YP Summit in Dallas.

2025 has been an exciting year, after attending the YP Summit, the AWWA DC Fly-in (learning how YPs can shape water policy), and ACE25 as a volunteer. She joins the monthly AWWA YPC calls, and she volunteered for the YP Summit's Local Host Committee to plan a Dallas welcome guide.

While Kwong has stepped down as the chapter's YP co-chair, she continues to advise the local YP Committee. Her new role as the Networking and Membership chair cements her commitment to a fulfilling TAWWA member experience, including the joint member appreciation social between TAWWA and WEAT, Adopt-A-Creek cleanups at Bartholomew Park, and the Women in Water bi-monthly luncheons and annual dinner.

Varenya Mehta

Varenya Mehta has demonstrated sustained, high-impact service to AWWA through leadership roles, robust programming, hands-on outreach, and consistent collaboration that advances young professionals at the chapter, section, and national levels.

Mehta served as co-chair of the SE Chapter's YP Committee in 2021 & 2022. During his time in this role, he organized a multitude of events including the following:

- Plant tours of the City of Houston's Northeast Water Purification Plant Expansion and the City of Sugar Land's Surface Water Treatment Plant,
- Tour of a manufacturing facility that produces treatment process equipment, such as belt presses, centrifuges, and heat exchangers,

(Continued)

- Multiple technical webinars on topics of interest, such as impacts of Winter Storm Uri, polyfluoroalkyl substances, and the mentor-mentee relationship,
- Southeast Texas Chapter’s 2022 YP Seminar,
- Numerous YP happy hours and networking events,
- Volleyball YP Happy Hour with local ASCE chapter to promote inter-organizational networking,
- Collaboration with the local Water Environment Association of Texas section to identify volunteers to judge projects by local middle and high school students at the Science Engineering Fair of Houston, and
- Collaboration with other local YP organizations to pack over 45,000 meals at the Houston Food Bank.

Based on these and other contributions, Mehta was recognized with the TAWWA Maverick Award in 2023. Since that time, Mehta has taken on additional roles in the section and organization.

He is currently serving as chair of the section’s Water Quality & Technology Committee, where

he is advancing several new statewide initiatives, such as a statewide survey of corrosion control treatment practices and organizing technical webinars on topics of interest (e.g., PFAS). He signed up for TAWWA’s “Water 2050” initiative and is assisting in recruiting YPs to participate and align with long-term priorities of section leadership.

Mehta also is active at the organizational level. He is a contributing author on the forthcoming revisions to AWWA practice manuals M20 and M65. Mehta is a member of the Engineering Modeling Applications Committee and Digital Twins Community. In 2021, he participated in the AWWA/WEF National YP Summit. He has presented numerous times in the YP track at AWWA conferences: ACE 2022 and numerous times at Texas Water between 2020 and 2025.

Across leadership posts, conference stewardship, technical education, service events, and mentorship pipelines, Mehta consistently creates opportunities for YPs to lead and raises the technical bar of Section programming. His portfolio blends program creation, outreach, and authorship/presentation, directly advancing AWWA’s mission and the growth of the next generation of water professionals.

Texas Section American Water Works Association

Competitions

- **Junior Meter Challenge (Tuesday)**
- **Meter Challenge (Tuesday)**
- **Pipe Tapping (Wednesday)**
- **Top Ops (Wednesday)**
- **Best Tasting Drinking Water (Wednesday)**
- **Hydrant Hysteria (Wednesday)**

The above awards are presented
at the competition location following each competition.

AMERICAN WATER WORKS ASSOCIATION

DIVERSITY & INCLUSION AWARD

...to recognize an individual or organization that establishes an environment that effectively creates diverse methods for access to water.

Greg Wukasch

Greg Wukasch is a visionary leader who embeds equity and inclusion into the core of the San Antonio Water System's operations and community programs. His work has transformed affordability assistance into a holistic, dignity-centered initiative that serves as a model for utilities nationwide.

Wukasch's efforts go beyond compliance; they create spaces where all customers and employees can thrive as their authentic selves. In addition to his work with SAWS, the Texas Section of AWWA has benefited from Wukasch's leadership in the Education Division and the Diversity & Inclusion Committee. His contributions and support for diversity, equity, and inclusion has been felt in webinars on water equity, discussions over generational communication, and honest conversations at Texas Water. He always brings his heart for helping people and doing the right thing in every situation.

Wukasch has worked in the External Affairs Department with the San Antonio Water System for 26 years, overseeing both the SAWS Education and Customer Assistance programs. In 2018, he helped launch Uplift, a proactive assistance initiative to help the most vulnerable San Antonio neighbors in need.

Wukasch spearheaded the UPLIFT Program, a reimagined affordability and assistance initiative designed to remove barriers and reduce stigma for low-income families. Goals included simplifying access, expanding eligibility, and aligning staff resources for proactive community outreach.

Wukasch's big picture thinking and passion for giving back to his community-initiated

programs through SAWS that greatly benefited the community. He was constantly asking the team how they can serve more neighbors and how can they reach the community where they live. Wukasch recognized that the people serving the community had to reflect the community they serve.

SAWS is an anchor institution in the San Antonio area, and Wukasch is an anchor for his team. He and his team continue to think of ways to help their community during times such as natural disasters or loss of income from the current federal government shutdowns as San Antonio is a large military city. Whatever goal is set, Greg will find a way to reach it. He is also establishing guidelines for the future so the work at SAWS can continue.

Wukasch amplified SAWS' impact beyond San Antonio by leading Texas Equity Coalition efforts and hosting national racial equity cohorts through the U.S. Water Alliance. These initiatives convened leaders from utilities across the country to develop frameworks for equitable hiring, contracting, and service delivery. His advocacy has seeded industry-wide conversations on making equity a core value and creating opportunities for utilities to adopt inclusive practices.

He also serves as the Education Division chair for TAWWA and under this division created the Water Geeks program. The Education Division is committed to education of not only our water and wastewater professionals but of our youth and Young Professionals who will become the leaders of the water community.

To meet their goals, the division provides a multi-faceted approach to education. The Water Geek

(Continued)

videos allow people to understand what is involved in treating and delivering safe, clean water to homes and businesses in the community and is essential to understanding what utilities do every day. These videos are designed for all audiences and all age groups, and can be used in schools, community meetings, and other opportunities to help the public understand how utilities operate.

These videos are produced for both English and Spanish speakers and include a video of the

wonderful diversity of jobs and people in the water industry. Greg was instrumental in the concept, creation, and promotion of these videos. Greg has also assisted TAWWA's Diversity and Inclusion committee with webinars on water equity, in person round table discussions over why diversity, equity, and inclusion is needed in the water industry, and is always willing to assist where needed to reach more people. The Water Geek and D&I videos can be found on TAWWA's website.

AMERICAN WATER WORKS ASSOCIATION

DIVERSITY & INCLUSION AWARD NOMINEE

...to recognize an individual or organization that establishes an environment that effectively creates diverse methods for access to water.

Mbroh Engineering

Mbroh Engineering is a strong advocate for inclusivity in the workplace, diversity of staff and ideas, and a supporter of the TAWWA's Diversity & Inclusion Committee. Since it's founding 19 years ago, the company delivers value to project approaches and client solutions through diversity.

Diversity is celebrated and embedded in every aspect of its operations. Mbroh Engineering has embraced cultural, educational, and gender diversity, ensuring that differences are valued and voices are heard. Further, as the company expanded and hired additional company leaders, their management and leadership team is diverse in gender, race, and counties of origin.

This commitment extends beyond internal practices to industry engagement and community partnerships, making MBROH a leader in advancing equity in the water sector.

Tony Mbroh, president/CEO, is a business leader for diversity and inclusion. Through his efforts, he has grown the team at Mbroh Engineering to include over 55 diverse employees across Texas and

Oklahoma. He has brought together a group of highly talented, educated professionals with over three-quarters of the team's diversity from unique countries of origin and race. These countries include: Ghana, Iran, Afghanistan, Korea, India, and Morocco.

By embracing the power of diversity to build a successful and collaborative company, Mbroh's professionals bring different strengths to the table through various educational backgrounds, training, and international work experience. Over time, their highly diverse team is stronger than just their professional talents and experiences. They share past and present personal experiences with each other, allowing them to show up as their authentic selves and learn from one another. They lean on and support one another because, many times, shared experiences and similar challenges are discovered and embraced.

Mbroh's diversity approach is not a single program but a foundational principle that shapes its culture and business practices. Goals include fostering collaboration across diverse backgrounds,

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supporting minority-owned businesses, and creating safe spaces for dialogue.

In April 2022, they officially unveiled the Mbroh Engineering Terrace on campus at the University of Texas at Dallas. This was the culmination of two years of partnership with UTD's Diversity Scholar Program and the university's National Society of Black Engineers to establish an endowed scholarship that now provides yearly scholarship support for high-achieving students of diverse backgrounds who show significant financial need. Tony personally benefitted from NSBE during his college career, and with over 60 guests and colleagues in attendance, it was a humbling

experience to see the impact that this financial support will have on others' lives.

Mbroh's purpose in funding UTD's scholarship is for Mbroh Engineering to serve as a beacon of opportunity and insight with the engineering academic community in a valuable combination of traditional education and practical real-world knowledge. In this commitment to multi-year annual support for UTD's NSBE Chapter, Mbroh Engineering hopes to provide a consistent and reliable stream of additional resources needed to continue programming, seminars, and engineering projects that complement the quality education provided at UTD.

AMERICAN WATER WORKS ASSOCIATION

AWARD OF MERIT NOMINEE

An award of achievement to those outside the water profession who have demonstrated outstanding service in support of the principles of AWWA in providing better water for people.

Ivonne de Santiago, Ph.D.

Dr. Ivonne Santiago's career exemplifies the mission of the American Water Works Association to create a better world through better water. A passionate civil and environmental engineer, educator, and community advocate, Santiago has dedicated more than 25 years to advancing equitable access to safe and sustainable water. Her work is deeply rooted in AWWA's principles of public health protection and promotion, innovation, collaboration, and sustainability.

As an associate professor of civil engineering at the University of Texas at El Paso, Santiago teaches both undergraduate and graduate courses in civil and environmental engineering, while serving as the coordinator of the Civil Engineering Senior Design Capstone Program, director of the Hydraulics Laboratory, and accreditation

coordinator for her department. Her educational approach integrates hands-on, real-world projects with classroom learning, inspiring future engineers to view their profession as one of service.

She encourages students to engage with communities in need, empowering them to design solutions that directly improve quality of life through sustainable engineering.

Santiago's influence extends far beyond the walls of academia. She believes that true engineering excellence lies in understanding and serving people, especially those in marginalized or underserved communities. Her philosophy embodies AWWA's core values of diversity, equity, and inclusion, stressing these attributes in ensuring that water solutions address not just technical needs, but human ones.

(Continued)

Santiago's extensive body of work encompasses a number of community-focused engineering works to include:

- **Haiti Water Project:** Santiago led a team of students to design and build a solar-powered reverse osmosis water treatment system for the rural village of Po Ploom, Haiti. This system, which is still operational today, provides safe drinking water to 500 residents who previously had to walk hours to access unsafe sources.
- **Hurricane Maria Relief in Puerto Rico:** In the aftermath of the devastating storm, she organized students through Engineers for a Sustainable World to construct a suspension bridge in one of Puerto Rico's most affected areas, reconnecting communities and restoring access to essential resources.
- **Safe Drinking Water for U.S.–Mexico Border Colonias:** As principal investigator on a North American Development Bank-funded project, Dr. Santiago led a team that identified contamination in border communities, distributed filtration systems, and provided education on water quality and conservation.

These are just a few highlighted initiatives reflecting her belief that clean, reliable water is a human right. This belief strongly aligns with AWWA's mission to ensure safe and sustainable water for all.

Santiago's leadership transcends her university role. As chair of the El Paso Water Public Service Board, she brought her deep technical expertise and community perspective to guide one of the most forward-thinking water utilities in the nation.

Her leadership has been instrumental in advancing El Paso Water's strategic stormwater management and infrastructure resilience, efforts that protect public health and ensure water security in one of the driest regions of the United States.

In her capacity as a member of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's National Advisory Committee and former member of the Good Neighbor Environmental Board, Santiago has influenced federal policy on air and water quality issues along the U.S.–Mexico border. Her advocacy for long-term, sustainable infrastructure investment echoes AWWA's value of professionalism and foresight in public service, ensuring that utilities act as stewards for future generations.

Santiago views engineering as "a profession of service," and she instills this ideology in every student she mentors. By pushing the boundaries of where the classroom exists, she transforms education into a vehicle for social change. Her mentoring has shaped hundreds of young engineers who now lead with empathy, professionalism, and integrity in the water industry and beyond.

Her students learn that true innovation is not merely technical, it's human-centered.

Whether designing systems for drought resilience in El Paso or safe water access in Haiti, Santiago demonstrates that water is more than an engineering challenge; it is a moral imperative.

Dr. Ivonne Santiago's lifelong dedication to improving water systems, mentoring future engineers, and promoting equity and sustainability stands as a testament to AWWA's principles. Her work embodies the spirit of collaboration, innovation, and stewardship that defines the Association's mission to provide better water for people everywhere.

Through her teaching, leadership, and advocacy, Dr. Santiago exemplifies what it means to be a servant-leader in the water industry, creating a lasting legacy of compassion, excellence, and commitment to a better world through better water.

AMERICAN WATER WORKS ASSOCIATION

HONORARY MEMBER AWARD NOMINEE

...recognizes an individual whose knowledge and accomplishments in the field of water supply entitle them to special recognition.

Elston Johnson

Elston Johnson has been a driving force in shaping water policy and advancing utility outcomes for more than 30 years. He currently leads his own organization of water professionals dedicated to supporting utilities and the communities they serve.

Throughout his career, Johnson has applied his deep expertise in environmental regulation—at both the state and federal levels—to foster collaboration among diverse stakeholders, advise elected officials, and protect vital water resources. His work spans drinking water and wastewater compliance, water security, and resource management.

Elston earned a Bachelor of Science in bioenvironmental sciences from Texas A&M University and a Master of Science in environmental science from the University of Texas at San Antonio. He began his career at the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality, where he spent two decades in leadership and technical roles. From 2007 to 2012, he directed the agency's Drinking Water Program and coordinated infrastructure protection for thousands of Texas water systems. From 2012 to 2014, he served as water security coordinator and technical specialist, advising on drought response and the Texas Drinking Water Program.

In 2009, Johnson was recognized as TCEQ's Permitting Office Manager of the Year for his leadership in restoring water service following Hurricane Ike. During his tenure, he also

represented Texas on national committees, including the EPA National Drinking Water Advisory Council and the Department of Homeland Security's Water Sector Coordinating Council. He chaired or contributed to several key initiatives, such as the State of Texas Emergency Drinking Water Task Force, the Pharmaceutical Disposal Study, and the Drinking Water Advisory Workgroup.

In 2014, Johnson founded Elston Johnson & Associates, a consulting firm providing regulatory and policy expertise to the water and wastewater community. His firm's work includes regulatory compliance and decision support, securing financial resources for infrastructure, conducting risk and resiliency assessments, developing emergency response plans, and assisting utilities in meeting evolving regulatory requirements. Johnson continues to serve in an advisory capacity to TCEQ, offering guidance on compliance, drought management, and water security.

Johnson's commitment to the Texas Section AWWA spans multiple decades and leadership levels. He has chaired and served on numerous committees and divisions, served as chair of the Texas Section, and currently represents the section as one of its directors on the AWWA Board of Directors. He also chairs TXWARN, the state's utility-to-utility mutual aid program, and is a co-leader and curriculum developer for SETH, an innovative, award-winning program that prepares high school students to earn their state water operator licenses before graduation.

TEXAS SECTION - AMERICAN WATER WORKS ASSOCIATION

“DEAN” SHARP UTILITY AWARD

... recognizes Texas AWWA water utilities that have performed exceptional services in support of the SETH program that resulted in lasting impacts to the SETH participants.

City of Pflugerville

The City of Pflugerville has worked with the Pflugerville ISD for four years to introduce high school seniors to careers in the water and wastewater industry through outreach and summer internships.

The SETH curriculum has been championed by this partnership during the 2024 & 2025 Summer Skilled Trades Academy. The City of Pflugerville Utility department serves on the Skilled Trades Consortium, in partnership with Pflugerville ISD.

The Skilled Trades Consortium is a collaborative initiative focused on developing a local talent pipeline for high demand skilled trades, particularly in the water and wastewater industries. In 2025, the consortium regionalized their efforts to include other nearby public and private water/wastewater businesses and cities, such as the City of Round Rock, City of Manor, City of Austin, EPCOR, and Crossroads Utility Services, LLC.

The consortium meets three to five times each year to plan the annual summer Skilled Trades

Academy, through which students complete the SETH curriculum in order to test for the class D water operator license.

The Skilled Trades Academy model’s success is achieved through a blended learning approach. Students participate in direct instruction, visit treatment plants, well sites, and testing facilities to see the learning in practice, participate in a resume writing workshop and mock interview, and engage in demonstrations of relevant equipment and processes.

The Pflugerville utility supports the Skilled Trades Academy by providing subject matter experts to supplement the SETH curriculum during the academy, engaging with the students in the aforementioned mock interviews, providing plant tours, and offering internship positions to students who earn the provisional license. Throughout the year utility staff also participate in recruitment activities as an employer partner on the Skilled Trades Consortium.

Conference Night Out

Wednesday, April 29

The Espee

Ticket Required

TEXAS SECTION - AMERICAN WATER WORKS ASSOCIATION

MIKE HOWE OUTSTANDING SERVICE TO TAWWA AWARD

...recognizes those who have had a significant positive impact on the Texas Section of the American Water Works Association.

Jessica Woods

Water conservation is the most cost-effective and environmentally sound “new” source of water for Texas, essential for bridging the gap between a booming population and limited, finite water supplies.

As Texas faces projected population doubling by 2070 and frequent, severe droughts, conservation acts as a “source” by reducing demand, thereby extending existing water supplies and delaying the need for expensive water infrastructure projects. The Texas State Water Plan recognizes conservation as a core strategy to meet the water needs of the next 50 years, often considering it before developing new sources.

Conservation is generally cheaper than developing new reservoirs, pipelines, or desalination plants and studies show conservation programs costs significantly less per acre-foot than acquiring new water rights or treating new water sources.

The goal of the Texas Section AWWA Water Efficiency Division and its five sub-committees is to encourage and help utilities adopt the best practices for water conservation, reuse, water supply and loss management, and to communicate to the public why these efforts are the most effective methods to manage water, our precious resource.

In addition, the division, and its volunteers, led by Jessica Woods of the City of Round Rock, are committed to training utility water conservation practitioners in best practices to craft the best programs for their communities.

In 2022, Woods led the task force that completed the only comprehensive Texas Municipal Water Conservation Coordinator Guidebook designed specifically for Texas utility conservation coordinators to meet legislative requirements.

This guidebook is the first in the country to provide specific and comprehensive guidance for all levels of municipal water conservation and water management. Initially presented in a three-part statewide webcast series the manual and webcast training are now available at no cost to any water conservation and management practitioner.

For her many years of extraordinary and committed leadership in helping utilities to build a long-term water supply for Texas, and for leading and guiding the extraordinary group of dedicated water conservation and water management volunteers spread across five subcommittees, the Texas Section AWWA is honored to present the Mike Howe Outstanding Service to TAWWA Award to Jessica Woods.

Save the dates!

Texas Water™ 2027

March 30-April 2

Houston

TEXAS SECTION – AMERICAN WATER WORKS ASSOCIATION

WILLIAM T. “DOC” BALLARD AWARD

William T. “Doc” Ballard was one of those people who not only was the consummate professional in his work, but also a mentor to many, and a friend to all. As a graduate of the University of Texas at Austin in 1946, and later with a Masters in Engineering from Georgia Tech, “Doc” began his career as a professional engineer with the State Public Health Department. He was assigned to the Tyler District Office and remained in Tyler working for the Department of Health, and later with LaGlonia Oil and Gas. He returned to the Department of Health as regional engineer of the Tyler office until his retirement in 1987. “Doc” was a consultant in water and wastewater treatment until his death in November 1999.

Many knew “Doc” from his work with utilities, his many scholarly and practical writings published in a variety of professional publications and his active role with organizations such as AWWA, WEF, WEAT and TWUA. And, he was a Texas Section AWWA Fuller Award Winner in 1991. For all that

“Doc” did, those who knew him best remember him for what he did for others. As a public health professional, he remained committed throughout his long and productive career to helping us in the water profession do our jobs better and more effectively. And, “Doc” did it with a personal touch that made him a great mentor, teacher and welcome friend.

In 1999, the Texas Section AWWA created the W. T. “Doc” Ballard Award to recognize those Texas Section members who have distinguished themselves in our profession by using their personal influence to shape the course of change in our profession by helping utilities and individuals serve the profession better.

This award is not presented every year and only to those whose selfless contributions to the industry, beyond all others, deserves recognition.

The recipient of this award is kept secret until announced publicly.

TEXAS SECTION – AWWA WILLIAM T. “DOC” BALLARD AWARD WINNERS

2000	Glen Doty*	2012	Ronny Hyde	2019	Katie McCain
2001	C.K. Foster*	2014	Thomas Taylor*	2020	Glenda Dunn
2002	Charlotte Voelker	2015	Charlie Maddox	2024	Jason Gehrig
2003	Henry Graeser*	2016	Charlie Anderson	2025	Brent Locke
2004	John Kubala*	2017	Jack Schulze		
2009	Kay Kutchins*	2018	Steve Walden		

** Deceased*

Drinking Water Week
May 3-9

AMERICAN WATER WORKS ASSOCIATION

GEORGE WARREN FULLER AWARD

One of the most prestigious awards in the water profession is the George Warren Fuller Award for distinguished service to the water supply field. The award is given in “commemoration of the sound engineering skill, the brilliant diplomatic talent and the constructive leadership, which characterized the life of George Warren Fuller.”

The Texas Section is able to award two Fuller Awards each year, should more than one suitable candidate meet the award’s high standards.

This year’s award recipients are selected by previous Fuller Award winners, and kept a tightly guarded secret until the Texas Water Luncheon. In a unique

ceremonial process, all Fuller Award winners in attendance are called to assemble in the front of the room. The group then begins searching the room for the person(s) known only to the committee members as this year’s Fuller awardee.

Slowly, as a brief highlight of this year’s awardees are read, the group converges on each winner’s location in the room. As the group converges, the detail in the awardees’ career highlights will become more and more specific.

See if you realize at the last moment who the awardees are for 2026!

TEXAS SECTION – AWWA GEORGE WARREN FULLER AWARD WINNERS

1972	Robert P. Van Dyke*	1995	Katie McCain	2017	Christianne Castleberry
1973	Haskell R. Street*	1996	Jack A. Renfro	2018	Jennifer Elms
1974	Richard G. Toler*	1997	Randy J. Goss	2019	Shay Roalston
1975	David R. Smallhorst*	1998	Ronny Hyde	2020	Brent Locke
1976	John H. Stacha*	1999	Steve Walden	2020	Wayne Owen
1977	J. L. Robinson*	2000	Carole Baker	2021	Bruce Curtis
1978	John T. Hickerson*	2001	Mark Lowry	2021	Elston Johnson
1979	Otis Goldman*	2002	Bill Riley	2022	Sally Mills-Wright
1980	George O. Muller	2003	Gary Smith	2022	Melissa Bryant
1981	Charles K. Foster*	2004	Jeannie Wiginton	2023	Heather Cook
1982	Glen Doty*	2005	Charles Anderson	2023	Fiona Allen
1983	John Kubala*	2006	Glenda Dunn	2024	Andrew Molly
1984	Phil Kosub*	2007	Bill Smith	2024	Jack Schultz
1985	James H. Bailey*	2008	Dean Sharp	2025	Alissa Lockett
1986	Thomas D. Tiner	2009	Mike Howe	2025	Stacy Walters
1987	Michael K. Tubbs	2010	Charles Maddox		
1988	Michael Meadows	2011	Mary L. Gugliuzza		
1989	Kay Kutchins*	2012	Richard Talley		
1990	Dennis L. Allen	2013	Daniel Nix		
1991	W. T. “Doc” Ballard*	2014	Donna Howe		
1992	Lee. C. Bradley, Jr.	2015	Ron Tamada		
1994	F. Warren Norris	2016	Dave Scholler		

** Deceased*

Awards Celebration

April 29, 2026, noon

Hemisfair Ballroom C 2,3

WATER ENVIRONMENT ASSOCIATION OF TEXAS

RONALD B. SIEGER BIOSOLIDS MANAGEMENT AWARD

...recognizes a WEAT member(s), an engineering firm, a specific project, a municipality, or a specific municipal or industrial facility that has made significant accomplishments in the field of biosolids technology and management practices within the boundaries of the State of Texas.

Scott A. Hardy, P.E., PMP

Scott A. Hardy has spent 27 years in the water industry, specializing in solids process improvements. With experience across the U.S. and in South America, Hardy's areas of expertise include thickening, anaerobic digestion, digester gas utilization, dewatering, drying, advanced thermal treatment, and nutrient recovery.

Hardy has dedicated his career to advancing the sustainability and success of water and wastewater infrastructure and its providers. His work focuses on delivering technical solutions that enhance the efficiency and environmental stewardship of utility operations.

In addition to his technical work, Hardy has stepped up numerous times as a WEAT Biosolids Management Committee member. He initiated the Biosolids Beauty Contest at the 2023 WEAT Biosolids Specialty Conference and has assisted with bringing the contest to Texas Water for three consecutive years. The contest's goal is not only to educate the industry about biosolids in an engaging way but, more importantly, to recognize the excellent work utilities and their staff perform

every day to dispose of and beneficially reuse biosolids.

Hardy has been part of the planning and coordination committee for two of the Biosolids Specialty Conferences hosted by WEAT, highlighting his dedication to advancing industry knowledge and addressing critical challenges. He was co-chair of the 2025 WEAT Biosolids Specialty Conference, where local and nationwide experts addressed pressing issues related to PFAS in biosolids.

Hardy's career-long commitment to the water/wastewater industry, his efforts in furthering both public and professional education, and perception of beneficial biosolids management, and his work for the Biosolids Management Committee represent the very best of clean water professionals and WEAT volunteers.

His contributions demonstrate a deep commitment to the technical advancement and public advocacy of biosolids management in Texas, and he is deservedly recognized with WEAT's 2026 Ron Sieger Biosolids Management Award.

WATER ENVIRONMENT ASSOCIATION OF TEXAS

ALAN H. PLUMMER ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY AWARD

...recognizes an individual who has made outstanding contributions in the field of environmental sustainability practices within the state of Texas.

Keisuke Ikehata, Ph.D.

Dr. Keisuke Ikehata is an associate professor in the Ingram School of Engineering at Texas State University, San Marcos, Texas. He joined Texas State in July 2019 as one of the four founding faculty members of the new civil engineering program, after earning his Ph.D. in civil and environmental engineering from the University of Alberta in 2003. Before beginning his career in academia, he worked at a water resources engineering firm in Southern California for eight years. Over his career, he has authored more than 230 technical publications, including over 60 peer-reviewed articles, and delivered more than 100 professional presentations.

A dedicated educator and mentor, Ikehata is committed to training the next generation of engineers and scientists who will drive environmental sustainability and water reuse. He teaches undergraduate and graduate courses in water and wastewater treatment and advises students from diverse fields, including civil engineering, engineering technology, chemistry, biology, and aquatic resources.

Over the past six years, he has supervised seven master's theses, and has mentored over 20 undergraduate researchers. He is currently advising two doctoral dissertations and two master's theses. As the faculty advisor for the TAWWA-WEAT student chapter at Texas State, he fosters student engagement with professional organizations and inspires future leaders in water resources.

Ikehata collaborates closely with water professionals from utilities such as the City of San Marcos, the San Antonio Water System,

and the City of Wichita Falls, consulting firms, technology providers, and regulatory agencies. These partnerships provide students with valuable opportunities to interact and learn through classes, research projects, and student chapter activities.

Ikehata's research focuses on advancing direct potable reuse technologies, emphasizing real-time water quality monitoring, integrating alternative water sources, and addressing public acceptance challenges through attention to taste, odor, and appearance. One of his key initiatives is a DPR pilot project at the City of San Marcos Wastewater Treatment Plant, funded by a U.S. Bureau of Reclamation's Desalination and Water Purification Research - Pitch to Pilot grant.

In 2022, his team constructed and deployed a 1.5-gpm pilot-scale advanced water purification system incorporating ozonation, biological activated carbon, ultrafiltration/microfiltration, reverse osmosis, and an ultraviolet advanced oxidation process. This project has provided strategies for monitoring and controlling disinfection by-products and pathogens to improve safety and feasibility.

Complementing this work, Ikehata has investigated stormwater as a supplementary source for DPR, evaluating its feasibility as a diluent for reclaimed water to reduce total dissolved solids and potentially enable DPR without reverse osmosis. This is research that can bridge technical innovation with a practical approach to expanding the viability of DPR systems by addressing public concerns about taste, odor, and appearance.

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Beyond research and teaching, Ikehata actively contributes to advancing water reuse and sustainability through professional service. A member of the WEAT Water Reuse Committee since 2021, he also holds leadership roles in WaterReuse Texas, the American Water Works Association, and the International Ozone

Association. His contributions have earned recognition from water utilities, state agencies, and industry professionals, shaping the future of water reuse in Texas and beyond. WEAT is delighted to recognize this legacy of excellence with our 2026 Alan Plummer Environmental Sustainability Award.

WATER ENVIRONMENT ASSOCIATION OF TEXAS

CLEAN SHORES CHALLENGE AWARDS

Now celebrating its 11th year, the WEAT Clean Shores Challenge (CSC) continues to unite sections across Texas in a friendly competition that fosters environmental stewardship and community engagement. Through cleanup events, WEAT volunteers play a crucial role in keeping Texas waterways clean while raising awareness about the importance of protecting our natural resources.

This year's challenge saw outstanding participation, with sections demonstrating incredible enthusiasm, creativity, and dedication. From large-scale cleanup efforts to innovative community outreach, these teams made a lasting impact. The Public Communications and Outreach Committee is excited to announce the winners of the 2025-2026 WEAT Clean Shores Challenge!

TRASHIEST SECTION AWARD

Hill Country Section

The Hill Country Section demonstrated exceptional dedication by organizing a tributary cleanup during the City of San Antonio's Basura Bash. About 80 volunteers tackled a half-mile stretch of Olmos Creek, removing an astounding 2800 lbs of trash! About 50 full contractor bags

were collected, along with larger items like wooden pallets, tires, a bowling ball, and a segment of HDPE pipe. Their efforts not only cleaned the creek but also improved stream flow by clearing branches and other debris.

MOST SPIRITED SECTION AWARD

Southeast Section

The Southeast Section demonstrated extraordinary enthusiasm and engagement by volunteers, and beyond. Volunteers from consulting engineering firms and city public works brought their significant others and children, making

it a family-driven cleanup event. This event included matching t-shirts, a safety briefing, and distribution of personal protective equipment tools, and of course, breakfast tacos; no Texas event is complete without them!

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MOST CREATIVE SECTION AWARD

Central Texas Section

The Central Texas Section showcased remarkable creativity during the Monster Trash Bash Kayak Cleanup Event. The event included a Halloween costume contest and contests recognizing the most trash collected and the most interesting trash. The awards were made to fit the Halloween theme;

handmade coffin boxes with a vampire-shaped chocolate inside were given out. Their unique outreach efforts helped engage the community in environmental stewardship and encourage continuous participation.

MOST INTERESTING TRASH AWARD

North Texas Section

The North Texas Section took home the Most Interesting Trash award for their discovery of a DeWALT 120 PSI air compressor during their cleanup. This unusual find sparked curiosity and highlighted the unexpected and sometimes bizarre items that end up polluting our waterways.

The unique find made it a standout entry in this category, reinforcing the importance of ongoing cleanup efforts to keep our environment free of waste, and we could not help but ask, “does the air compressor still work?”.

WATER ENVIRONMENT ASSOCIATION OF TEXAS

SELECT SOCIETY OF SANITARY SLUDGE SHOVELERS

The Select Society of Sanitary Sludge Shovelers was founded by the Arizona Member Association in 1940. It originated to encourage members to get involved. You cannot join the society – you must be “selected” on the basis of merit. Within WEAT, induction into the prestigious society is based on “outstanding, meritorious service above and beyond the call of duty by recruiting at least five new members.” Shovels may also be awarded for exceptional service as established by the WEAT Board.

- **Liz Holguin**
 - **Fidan Karimova**
 - **Stephen Kelly**
 - **Eric Kong**
 - **Barry Liner**
 - **Daniela Lopez**
 - **Stephen Maldonado**
 - **Ophelie Messan**
 - **Jennifer Nations**
 - **Adan Niederpruem**
 - **Kalpna Solanki**
 - **Arianne Shipley**
 - **Emma Tucker**
 - **Gerardo Valenzuela**
 - **Meg Pierce Walsh**
 - **Jin Ye**
 - **Alex Zuniga**
- **Alison Bennett**
 - **Nick Dons**
 - **Jose Emilio Fernandez**
 - **Perry Fowler**
 - **Grant Gayle**
 - **Scott Hardy**

WATER ENVIRONMENT ASSOCIATION OF TEXAS

PROJECT EXCELLENCE AWARD

...recognizes excellence and innovation in the execution of projects and programs in the water sector.

City of Sherman

South Wastewater Treatment Plant - Membrane Bioreactor

The City of Sherman has been experiencing significant industrial growth spurred by the CHIPS Act. Semiconductor industries have announced potential investments up to \$35 billion within the city's jurisdictional limits. As a result, a large-scale infrastructure improvements program was undertaken to prepare for these industries, which included wastewater treatment.

The city elected to proceed with a new treatment train utilizing the membrane bioreactor technology to handle the challenging industrial wastewater. The industrial waste stream includes ammonia concentrations exceeding 100 mg/L, biochemical oxygen demand concentrations below 100 mg/L, and biological inhibitory compounds. To meet the timeline from the industries, the new treatment train had to be designed, constructed, and commissioned within two and a half years.

A construction-manager-at-risk delivery method was chosen to meet the challenging timeline. Preliminary engineering began in May 2023, and the CMAR was selected in August of that year. The design then progressed in a phased approach to produce a series of 13 equipment pre-procurement, preselection, and work packages. This approach allowed for long-lead electrical and

process equipment to be procured and delivered much more quickly than a conventional delivery approach and for construction work to begin while the design was being finalized.

Detailed design was completed in only six months, and the construction efforts proceeded at the same intense pace, allowing the facility to be ready for commissioning in one and a half years. The equipment was commissioned within three months, and the biological seeding process was completed within three weeks. By October 2025, the city was accepting and successfully treating the challenging industrial wastewater, meeting the required timeline.

This project exemplifies what incredible collaboration, consistent teamwork, and quick problem solving can accomplish. There were conflicts and challenges throughout the project, but through clear communication, timely workshops, and consistent on-site presence, the project team was able to cultivate an environment of trust and collaboration. This environment allowed all conflicts and challenges to be resolved in a timely manner and accommodate long term growth. WEAT is delighted to recognize this with our inaugural Project Excellence Award.

Water for People Silent Auction

Use the Handbid app.

Bidding ends at 1:15 p.m. Wednesday

WATER ENVIRONMENT ASSOCIATION OF TEXAS

INNOVATIVE TECHNOLOGY AWARD

...recognizes the people and companies behind innovative solutions that are making a difference in solving some of the sector's most pressing water challenges

Alence Poudel, P.E.

Alence Poudel, P.E., serves as an engineering manager for the City of Sugar Land, Texas, where he leads infrastructure planning, modeling, and asset management initiatives that have profoundly transformed how the city uses data to make smarter, more sustainable decisions.

A 2021 graduate of Texas A&M University, Poudel sits at the intersection of civil engineering and data science. His work focuses on bridging traditional engineering with modern data analytics, leveraging tools like GIS, Python, SQL, and predictive modeling to enhance capital planning and project delivery. His commitment to public sector innovation and service has earned him recognition, including the City of Sugar Land's Trailblazer Employee of the Year award.

Poudel's process mechanical expertise is evident in the suite of decision-support tools he developed in-house. His flagship innovation is the Integrated Asset Management System+, a unified, cross-asset, risk-based prioritization framework. IAMS quantifies both the likelihood and consequence of failure and links those risk scores to cost-benefit logic, giving city leadership a transparent, data-backed reason to justify capital investments and replacing subjective project selection.

To refine this approach, he pioneered the Hydraulic Impact Factor. HIF explicitly incorporates hydraulic parameters like pressure, velocity, and water age into risk evaluation, ensuring that capital planning prioritizes renewals where a failure would degrade the level of service,

directly protecting customers and regulatory compliance.

Poudel's commitment to systems thinking extends to aligning risk management horizons. He created the Dual Horizon Capital Risk Framework, a machine-learning solution that synchronizes long-term capital strategy with immediate operational exposure. By blending lifecycle reliability modeling with AI signals, the framework allows the city to manage short-term vulnerabilities while planning for long-term resilience.

Furthermore, recognizing that technology requires governance, Alence led the development and piloting of an AI-Human Governance Policy Framework for utilities. This policy defines where AI can inform decisions and where licensed professional judgment must remain the final authority, establishing an ethical and accountable path for AI adoption in public infrastructure.

In addition to his groundbreaking work at the city, Poudel actively shares his methods through publications in journals like PM Magazine, and through mentorship of young engineers.

His influence is regional, with peer cities evaluating and adapting his frameworks, proving that advanced, hydraulics-aware asset management can be built, owned, and sustained inside a municipality. WEAT is proud to recognize Poudel, and this holistic approach to fostering a culture of continuous improvement with our Innovative Technology Award.

WATER ENVIRONMENT ASSOCIATION OF TEXAS

SIDNEY L. ALLISON AWARD

...recognizes a person (or entity) who has made significant contributions to the engineering, science, and/or operation and maintenance of wastewater collection and pumping stations with the mission to transport wastewater to a treatment plant.

James H. Forbes, Jr., P.E.

James Forbes's career spans over 50 years, during which he has become a nationally recognized authority in wastewater system evaluation, rehabilitation, and regulatory compliance. He holds a B.S. and M.S. in civil engineering from the University of Nebraska, where his thesis focused on Algae Removal by Upflow Filtration, and he is a WEF Lifetime Member.

He is a founder (2003) and serves as president of Pipeline Analysis LLC, located in Garland. He and his staff specialize in the modeling, testing, and inspection of wastewater collection system assets. Forbes has collaborated with municipal staff performing condition and capacity assessments and has assisted over 50 Texas communities in developing capacity, maintenance, operation and management and sanitary sewer overflow initiative programs, many under TCEQ and EPA consent decrees.

His guidance has been instrumental in helping utilities achieve compliance, enhance system reliability, and protect public health and the environment, resulting in fewer overflows and lower operating and capital costs across Texas. Over his tenure, he has served as project engineer or program manager on more than 500 wastewater system evaluations across the United States.

Beyond his consulting expertise, Forbes has significantly contributed to professional knowledge

through authorship and instruction. He co-authored the first joint ASCE/WPCF Manual of Practice FD-6 "Sewer System Evaluation and Rehabilitation," contributed to the ASCE "Manhole Rehabilitation Manual of Practice," and served on the WERF Research Committee where he authored the annual literature review on Collection Systems.

His pioneering work includes the introduction of high-capacity mineral-oil smoke testing, integrated GIS-linked field imagery into database reporting, and the development of the first "rehabilitation decision trees." He has presented over 60 papers at various state and national conferences, including WEAT, WEFTEC, and EPA workshops, with presentations often described as thought-provoking, instructional, and memorable. Furthermore, colleagues deeply respect his willingness to offer honest wisdom and guidance to help them grow in their careers.

Forbes's enduring impact on Texas' water environment, embodying the core values of technical excellence, mentorship, and service, has advanced not only technical practice but also the credibility of the profession he has served for more than five decades. He is a private pilot and avid fly fisherman, inspired daily by his wife, their two sons, and grandchildren. WEAT is proud to recognize him with the 2026 Sidney Allison Award.

TEXAS SECTION - AMERICAN WATER WORKS ASSOCIATION

CHAPTER AWARDS

Local chapters play an essential role in the achievement of Texas Section AWWA goals and objectives. Local chapters organize a multitude of professional and social programs, conduct membership recruitment and retention drives and support technical activities. Through the annual Chapter Awards program, Texas Section AWWA has the opportunity to recognize

the valuable contributions of local chapters as they strive to enrich, educate, and enlighten the AWWA membership. There are six individual categories: Chapter Communications, Community Service and Public Outreach, Chapter Educational Offerings, Fundraising, Membership Recruitment and Retention, and Mentorship.

CHAPTER COMMUNICATIONS

Desert Mountain Chapter

Recognizing the need to better engage students, young professionals, and emerging leaders, the Desert Mountain Chapter broadened its social media presence beyond email and LinkedIn by launching a new Instagram platform. This strategic expansion helped DMC increase visibility, enhance connection, and build a more accessible and inclusive online community.

The DMC's dual-platform strategy integrates traditional email announcements with consistent, timely updates across LinkedIn and Instagram. Knowing emails can get lost in congested inboxes, DMC prioritizes social media as an additional announcement method. Since launching the LinkedIn page in 2022, the DMC has seen steady

and encouraging growth. The page experienced a 44.5% increase by gaining 153 new followers in 2025, for a total of 497 followers. Now the chapter's focus is to expanding its Instagram presence. The goal is to nurture meaningful engagement among members through consistent interaction and educational content tailored to students and early-career professionals.

Member engagement has increased through community participation. Many members share event announcements, repost promotions, and offer personal insights from sessions they attend. These interactions amplify the chapters reach, reinforce community presence, and confirm that its communication strategy is on the right path.

MEMBERSHIP RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION

Desert Mountain Chapter

In 2025, the Desert Mountain Chapter strengthened its commitment to member recruitment and retention through intentional, high-value programming designed to recognize existing members while attracting new participants into the organization.

The first DMC Member Appreciation Night at Top Golf was launched to recognize the contributions and ongoing support of chapter members while creating a relaxed space for networking and celebration. As the first event of its kind, it drew 159 registered attendees.

To further promote membership interest among students and young professionals, the YP Committee hosted YP Karaoke Night, an approachable networking event designed to reduce barriers to participation and encourage relationship-building.

In addition to in-person outreach, the chapter prioritized retention through a targeted Membership Renewal Email Campaign aimed at re-engaging members with recently expired memberships.

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MENTORSHIP

North Central Texas Chapter

Our North Central Texas Chapter's Executive Committee has been intentional with mentorship of YP Leadership with parallel roles held at the Executive Committee level. The new YP communications co-chairs have been involved with announcements at chapter events and engagement with newsletter development, YP co-chairs and secretary have been engaged in Executive Committee meetings, and intentional progression into the Executive Committee Board from the YP leadership has taken place over the past year.

Improvements to the workflow and cross training of the virtual arrangements and communications chair roles has allowed the chapter to incorporate interactive components to meetings and help create opportunities for mentorship across roles.

Most recently, in November 2025, the chapter hosted its third Women of Water event with over 100 attendees. The event featured three new panelists: Stephanie Bache, vice president at Black & Veatch; Aliza Caraballo, Water and solid waste engineer manager at North Texas Municipal Water District; and Sarah Standifer, director of Dallas Water Utilities. It was moderated by Tony Mbroh and Marianna Anguiano, president of NCT AWWA.

Questions and discussions centralized around four overall themes: career path, challenges/obstacles, becoming a leader/leadership and becoming a mentor/mentorship. We are proud that the impact of this annual event continues to grow.

COMMUNITY SERVICE AND PUBLIC OUTREACH

South Texas Chapter

The South Texas Chapter members are passionate about serving the community and providing opportunities for local students to learn about the water industry. It partners with local organizations and schools to organize several public outreach and Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) events and Career Fair Days throughout the year.

The education outreach events of 2025 included various activities to conduct water experiments, talk about what it's like to be an engineer, and inspire the next generations of water industry professionals. Chapter members:

- helped judge the Alamo Regional Science Fair,
- inspired local students to pursue careers in STEM at the Colonies North Elementary School STEAM Night by conducting a wastewater treatment plant demonstration,
- discussed AWWA opportunities with Texas State University students,
- participated in the Walk 4 More Water for Africa Event. Each participant carried 3 gallons of water while walking nearly 2 miles to symbolize the challenges of gathering water experienced by women and children in other countries
- partnered with the WEAT Section to hold an Imagine a Day Without Water Art Contest. The winning entries were compiled into a calendar that was sold to raise funds for Water for People.
- partnered with San Antonio Water System to facilitate a scholarship to students who completed the SAWS Academy of Water Influencer Program and Projects related to various Water Industry Topics.

(Continued)

FUNDRAISING

South Texas Chapter

The South Texas Chapter of TAWWA based in San Antonio, partners with the local WEAT Hill Country Section for many of its events and fundraisers. Combining the events enables the chapter to reduce costs by splitting the expenses, but it also splits the net proceeds. Splitting the proceeds allows both organizations to benefit the local communities and support the missions of both WEAT and TAWWA.

Over the last year members of the South Texas Chapter raised funds for Water For People, the San Antonio Water System Uplift, local, state and Academy of Water Influencers TAWWA Educational Scholarships, More Water 4 Africa, and young professionals events.

The events raised \$177,325 for these noble missions on behalf of the South Texas TAWWA Chapter and the WEAT Hill Country Section. Some of the fundraising events were:

- Bingo for Bag, which includes a three-course dinner, multiple raffle prizes, and 20 rounds of bingo with a chance to win designer handbags. After expenses, the event raised over \$29,000.
- WFP Golf Tournament was held in the sweltering heat at the Canyon Springs Golf Club. This large event was sold out and after expenses raised over \$70,000.
- The South Texas Chapter and Hill Country Section alternate hosting the monthly meetings from January through October. After expenses the 2025 TAWWA led monthly meeting proceeds totaled \$780.
- TAWWA/WEAT Summer Seminar had over 60 professionals. After expenses the 2025 TAWWA proceeds totaled \$3,039 each.
- The TAWWA/WEAT Scholarship Dinner proceeds totaled \$48,240, with each group receiving \$24,120.

EDUCATIONAL OFFERINGS

Southeast Texas Chapter

The Southeast Texas Chapter, which takes pride in offering frequent events and activities in a variety of formats so members can participate. In 2025, over 1,100 people attended 16 educational opportunities. Some of the events are listed below.

- Volunteers participating the Houston ISD Seniors To Success event and the Pearland ISD career day opportunities at several area utilities;
- The Student Social, coordinated with ASCE and NSBE, was an opportunity to connect students with professionals in the local water industry;
- The Young Professionals Seminar featured three presentations by rising local YPs showcasing their projects and work experience and a panel discussion with three people in leadership roles, at different points in their career.
- The three-day One Water Summit, held in coordination with Corpus Christi Water, WEAT, and the Coastal Bend Chapter.
- The annual Half-day Seminar was held in collaboration with the WEAT Southeast Section. It featured presentations and panel discussions covering topics such as desalination efforts in Corpus Christi, water resources plan in Sugar Land, rehabilitation and expansion of City of Pearland wastewater treatment plants, One Water initiatives in El Paso, and general updates from Houston Public works, among much more.
- A tour of a REXA Inc facility in Tomball. REXA produces a high-performance actuator.

TEXAS SECTION - AMERICAN WATER WORKS ASSOCIATION

WATER CONSERVATION AND REUSE AWARDS

Each year, the Texas Section AWWA Conservation and Reuse Division recognizes those who have demonstrated excellence in Water Conservation and Reuse practices.

Small Utility - Quantifiable Project

Terranova West Municipal Utility

District

Effluent Reuse Program

In 2017, Terranova West Municipal Utility District (TNW MUD) began evaluating the use of reclaimed water for irrigation of HOA common areas along TC Jester Boulevard and the District's park to reduce reliance on potable water. This effort was driven by increasing groundwater and surface water costs charged by the North Harris County Regional Water Authority, along with long-term projections indicating continued annual rate increases. These rising costs created financial pressure on residents and need for a more cost-effective, sustainable irrigation supply.

NHCRWA's 2018 Alternative Water Incentive Program further supported the project by offering capital reimbursement and long-term usage credits for reclaimed water systems. Based on these incentives and the elimination of NHCRWA fees associated with irrigating common areas with potable water, TNW MUD estimated the system could be paid off in approximately 16 years.

Because TNW MUD does not operate a wastewater treatment plant, the District partnered with neighboring Bilma Public Utility District to utilize treated effluent from Bilma's WWTP. With engineering services provided by Baxter & Woodman, a Phase I reclaimed water system was designed and constructed to produce up to 156,000 gallons per day to meet peak summer irrigation demands. System capacity was allocated at 55 percent for TNW MUD and 45 percent for Bilma PUD. Installation included a reclaim water filtration and pump station and new 6-inch

reclaimed water lines using both trenchless and open-cut construction methods.

The completed system is expected to conserve approximately 18.5 million gallons of potable water annually, delivering long-term cost savings.

Medium Utility - Quantifiable Project

City of Cleburne

WWTP Exapnsion & Indirect Potable Reuse Program

Entering its 30th year of reuse, the City of Cleburne—an exurban North Texas community—translated a decade of planning into an integrated wastewater and indirect potable reuse program that augments Lake Pat Cleburne and strengthens drought resilience. Anticipating a 25% population increase over the next decade, the City identified urgent constraints in potable supply and wastewater treatment capacity. The program delivers a dual solution: expand the wastewater treatment plant and diversify the reuse system by constructing an IPR pathway to the reservoir. The project added 40% more treatment capacity via a 4-MGD North Treatment Train featuring energy-efficient BNR, 10-micron disk filtration, and UV disinfection. Reclaimed effluent is conveyed to Lake Pat Cleburne by a new reuse pump station and roughly four miles of pipeline, increasing initial reservoir yield by up to 4,400 acre-feet per year. The system also retains flexibility to serve existing non-potable customers or discharge to a receiving stream when appropriate.

IPR was selected after rigorous planning showed it would cost about 60% of the life-cycle cost of the next-best water-supply alternative. Financing through the Clean Water State Revolving Fund

(Continued)

provided approximately \$8.4 million in interest savings and a \$1 million grant, improving long-term affordability for residents and businesses. In its initial operating period, the North Treatment Train produced more than 500 million gallons of reuse water. Together, these outcomes demonstrate a resilient, affordable, and operator-friendly system that safeguards the lake, supports growth, and celebrates three decades of Cleburne's leadership in Texas water reuse.

Large Utility - Quantifiable Project

City of Austin

Landscape Transformation for New Single-Family Homes

To ensure a sustainable water future, City of Austin residents and businesses need to become more efficient. New homes need to be even more water wise through the transformation of landscapes that reduce the need to irrigate with drinking water. Such landscape transformation was a strategy in Austin's 2018 Water Forward Plan and water conservation staff have spent the last three years implementing the strategy.

After a year of public and stakeholder engagements and an additional year of evaluating the options and estimating the water that could be saved, Austin Water launched the implementation of six new activities that are expected to save potable water or provide an alternative water source for new single-family homes. Initial water saving estimates, if fully implemented, could result in an average annual landscape irrigation reduction of 14,600 gallons per new home.

Activities that have been implemented or substantially implemented include: required soil inspections, limiting the area of new irrigation systems, requiring additional irrigation pressure-regulating components, new irrigation system inspections, new homeowner irrigation controller checkups, and required laundry-to-landscape plumbing in new homes. In addition to the continued encouragement to use native and

adaptive plants, this multi-pronged approach towards landscape transformation addresses the drivers of high landscape water use in new homes: poor soil, system installation that does not meet code, and incorrectly set controllers.

While the irrigation and graywater reuse regulations are currently being fully executed and analysis of water savings continue, initial estimates of water saved in 2025 are just over 5 million gallons.

Non-Utility - Indirect Project

Tarrant Regional Water District

Empowering Your Water

Champions: TRWD Youth

Conservation Classes and Events

As the raw water supplier for 2.5 million people, TRWD recognizes the immense importance of planning and collaboration with those we serve, including the 25% of our water users under the age of 18. With the right values, knowledge, and skills, these youth can become the leaders we need to conserve and protect our water supply now and in the future!

To achieve this vision, TRWD Conservation developed three strategic programs to provide engaging, learning experiences for youth in Tarrant County: Water Explorers for Pre-K-5th grade students, Water-Wise Workshops for 6th-12th grade students, and Wonder of Water Events for students and families.

The overarching program goal is to empower young water champions to value, understand, conserve, and protect our water resources. To maximize student learning, inspire positive behavior change, and appeal to students and educators, all programs include age-appropriate, relevant, inquiry-based, multi-sensory, indoor and outdoor activities with a high fun factor. The school programs also align with state education standards.

(Continued)

TRWD launched the SaveTarrantWater.com youth program webpage in 2023 to promote our programs and the response has been overwhelmingly positive. In just five years, we have connected with over 31,700 young people, educators, and their families with 1,000 programs in 19 cities. Nearly 100% of teachers rated the quality of our lessons five out of five. Through our Family Feedback Challenge, we also receive positive feedback from students and families. We are confident these programs are helping empower young water champions to conserve and protect our water resources.

Medium Utility - Indirect Project

Texas Water Company

Texas Water Company Integrates One Water

To help ensure Texas Water Company continues to provide safe and reliable water in an area facing challenges such as rapid growth, recurring drought conditions, rising temperatures, and diminishing rainfall, the company recognized the need for decisive action. The organization made the strategic decision to remodel existing facilities to increase operational efficiency, accommodate additional employees, and with a primary objective that these remodels offset the demand for potable water by embedding One Water principles across all TWC campuses.

TWC's approach extended beyond standard water efficiency measures by installing permanent internal and external infrastructure designed to capture, treat, and reuse alternative water sources at the building level. This comprehensive integration of reclaimed water and reuse supports TWC's mission of sustainable resource management and addresses the pressing environmental concerns affecting the region.

TWC recognizes that all water-stormwater, rainwater, and wastewater have value and can be utilized as a single beneficial resource. The company used this belief in One Water to guide

their remodel projects and lead by example. Now, the facilities provide a durable framework for reducing potable demand in a drought-sensitive region and are a replicable model for Texas Water Company's future developments, as well as other entities.

Large Utility - Indirect Project

El Paso Water

Landscape Expo: An Inaugural Event

Landscaping a home can be challenging. Local nurseries are increasingly scarce, residential designers are difficult to find, and many landscape contractors are not yet well versed in water-smart installation practices. Adding to this, home improvement stores stock plants and landscape products that are not appropriate for our climate. For homeowners wanting sustainable, attractive landscapes, knowing where to start is often unclear.

In 2025, El Paso Water introduced a Landscape Expo focused on practical landscape guidance. More than 250 community members attended the Expo to learn skills such as planting and caring for trees, harvesting water, programming smart irrigation timers, selecting appropriate plants, gardening with compost, and designing water-smart landscapes. The event offered something for all ages.

Children participated in creative activities like painting and designing cardboard cacti, while adults attended presentations and visited Ask-An-Expert booths. Community partners - including the irrigation community, UTEP, Master Gardeners, and Master Naturalists - shared their expertise, reinforcing best practices for water-efficient landscaping. Local landscape designers provided specific design guidance, giving homeowners access to professional insight that is often difficult to obtain. These direct connections helped demystify landscape planning and encourage informed, water-smart choices tailored to El Paso's climate.

(Continued)

The event also featured burgers and hot dogs—because collaborative home decisions tend to go more smoothly with good food! Combined

with social media outreach, the Landscape Expo successfully advanced El Paso Water’s messaging on sustainable, water-smart landscapes.

TEXAS SECTION - AMERICAN WATER WORKS ASSOCIATION

BOB DERRINGTON RECLAMATION AWARD

The Bob Derrington Reuse Award is named after the visionary and innovative Odessa Texas Utility Manager who, in the 1980s, expanded Odessa’s existing water reuse program. As a strong advocate for reuse long before it was popular, Bob Derrington understood that the beneficial use of treated effluent and water conservation would not only increase water supplies for Odessa but help develop the expansion of reuse in Texas.

Bob Derrington Reclamation Award

City of Cleburne WWTP Expansion & Indirect Potable Reuse Program

Entering its 30th year of reuse, the City of Cleburne—an exurban North Texas community—translated a decade of planning into an integrated wastewater and indirect potable reuse program that augments Lake Pat Cleburne and strengthens drought resilience. Anticipating a 25% population increase over the next decade, the City identified urgent constraints in potable supply and wastewater treatment capacity. The program delivers a dual solution: expand the wastewater treatment plant and diversify the reuse system by constructing an IPR pathway to the reservoir. The project added 40% more treatment capacity via a 4-MGD North Treatment Train featuring energy-efficient BNR, 10-micron disk filtration, and UV

disinfection. Reclaimed effluent is conveyed to Lake Pat Cleburne by a new reuse pump station and roughly four miles of pipeline, increasing initial reservoir yield by up to 4,400 acre-feet per year. The system also retains flexibility to serve existing non-potable customers or discharge to a receiving stream when appropriate.

IPR was selected after rigorous planning showed it would cost about 60% of the life-cycle cost of the next-best water-supply alternative. Financing through the Clean Water State Revolving Fund provided approximately \$8.4 million in interest savings and a \$1 million grant, improving long-term affordability for residents and businesses. In its initial operating period, the North Treatment Train produced more than 500 million gallons of reuse water. Together, these outcomes demonstrate a resilient, affordable, and operator-friendly system that safeguards the lake, supports growth, and celebrates three decades of Cleburne’s leadership in Texas water reuse.

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Water for People Silent Auction

Use the Handbid app.

Bidding ends at 1:15 p.m. Wednesday

TEXAS SECTION - AMERICAN WATER WORKS ASSOCIATION
&
WATER ENVIRONMENT ASSOCIATION OF TEXAS

KEN MILLER WATER FOR PEOPLE FOUNDER'S AWARD

The Kenneth J. Miller Founder's Award was established in 2001 by the board of directors of Water For People to honor outstanding volunteer service to this international humanitarian effort. Water For People was conceived as a North American response to the water, sanitation and health needs of millions living in the developing world.

From its beginnings, Water For People was envisioned to be a volunteer effort of the North American water community. The American Water Works Association leaders who organized Water For People believed that water professionals would recognize the urgent necessity to support such a

cause by contributing their financial assistance, organizational skills and professional expertise. As the organization grew and began accomplishing its vision, it became evident that extraordinary volunteer efforts were being made at the local level that should be publicly acknowledged and honored. The Ken Miller Water for People Founder's Award was established to do this.

This award is given jointly by the Texas Section AWWA and WEAT. The winner is kept secret until announced. Also, the recipient is recognized by Water for People at the AWWA Annual Conference and Exposition.

*Congratulations
to all our award
recipients!*

TEXAS SECTION - AMERICAN WATER WORKS ASSOCIATION
&
WATER ENVIRONMENT ASSOCIATION OF TEXAS

WATERMARK AWARDS
FOR COMMUNICATION EXCELLENCE

MEMBER AWARDS

The Watermark Award for communications excellence recognizes WEAT and Texas Section AWWA members who have produced top quality communications. Effective internal and external communication is essential to a member's ability to provide excellent service. Today's water resource professionals must communicate with a variety of audiences to achieve success. Through these awards, Texas Section AWWA and WEAT hope to heighten awareness among all water resource professionals about the importance of effective communication.

Category I:

Communications programs: internal campaigns,
external campaigns, crisis communications

Large Utility

Woodland's Water Agency

***WaterSmart: Turning Data Into
Conservation Action***

Water conservation is central to Woodlands Water's mission, supported by multiple customer programs that promote water-wise practices inside and outside the home. In early 2022, Woodlands Water launched WaterSmart—a digital customer portal providing real-time water use data, leak alerts, personalized conservation recommendations, and tools to help customers better manage their water use.

Despite its potential, early adoption was limited: only 17% of customers were registered by the end of 2022, and more than one-third of residents were unaware the tool existed. Recognizing this missed opportunity, Woodlands Water implemented a comprehensive outreach strategy to reintroduce WaterSmart in a more personal, accessible way. Messaging shifted from abstract data to real-world stories, ease of use, and tangible benefits. Outreach expanded through in-person engagement, a

redesigned website, and the Woodlands Water Weekly, a highly successful e-newsletter with a consistent 72–74% open rate and 17,000+ subscribers. The results were dramatic. WaterSmart registration climbed to 30% by the end of 2023, 61% by the end of 2024, and surpassed 80% by November 2025. As outreach shifted from awareness to engagement, weekly portal usage increased 123% from 2024 to 2025. Today, WaterSmart stands as one of Woodlands Water's most effective conservation and customer support tools.

Small Utility

**Johnson County Special Utility District
JCSUD PFAS State of Emergency
Response**

In February 2025, Johnson County officials declared a countywide disaster declaration after PFAS contamination was discovered in farmland and private water wells in Grandview, TX.

Although the contamination originated outside JCSUD's water system and service area, the declaration created widespread concern about
(Continued)

drinking water safety across the county. As the largest water provider in Johnson County and a regional wholesale provider,

JCSUD faced an urgent need to reassure customers and partners and to clearly distinguish its system from the affected sources. JCSUD implemented a coordinated crisis communications response focused on protecting public trust, reducing confusion, and maintaining operational credibility. JCSUD issued public statements confirming its water supply was not impacted and met all state and federal standards, while directing affected residents to appropriate resources.

Consistent talking points were provided to customer service and field staff to ensure aligned messaging. Using a multi-channel approach, including website alerts, social media updates, staff coordination, and local collaboration, JCSUD addressed misinformation with clarity and empathy.

The response reduced customer anxiety, prevented the spread of misinformation, strengthened relationships with wholesale partners, and preserved public trust. This effort demonstrated the importance of proactive, transparent communication during crises, even when impacts originate outside an organization's system.

River Authorities or Water Districts:

Tarrant Regional Water District Workday Implementation Communications Campaign

TRWD's Workday implementation required replacing decades-old systems across HR, finance, and procurement, affecting all 400+ employees. The Communications team developed and led a campaign to prepare the organization for this massive change, creating a superhero-themed "Change Champions" network to humanize the transition.

Working with limited resources and significant coordination challenges from subject matter experts across IT, HR, Finance, and Procurement,

the Communications team produced most of the campaign in-house: strategic messaging, email series, educational videos, change champion spotlight features with custom cartoon hero avatars, posters, postcards, and training materials. The Comms team navigated constantly shifting information, changing implementation priorities, and tight timelines while maintaining a consistent, engaging narrative.

The campaign successfully prepared employees for the April 1, 2025 go-live, transforming what could have been a disruptive system change into an organized transition supported by clear, accessible communication that made complex enterprise software implementation feel manageable and even exciting.

Non-utilities:

Harris-Galveston Subsidence District An Altruistic Approach to Celebrating HGSD's 50th Anniversary

In 2025, the Harris-Galveston Subsidence District (HGSD) launched an altruistic communications campaign to celebrate its 50th anniversary and highlight the importance of preventing subsidence in Harris and Galveston counties.

The goal was simple: use this momentous milestone to improve understanding of subsidence and to share how reducing reliance on groundwater through regulation and water conservation can lead to a sustainable water future for the greater Houston area.

The campaign was structured around a temporary rebrand for the 2025 calendar year, featuring a new celebratory logo that retained original elements of the HGSD logo while offering a fresh look and the years of service to enhance recognition of the District's 50th anniversary.

Additionally, HGSD improved messaging across all platforms to ensure its mission was clearly understood through several educational opportunities, including the release of a hardbound book titled "Subsidence in the

(Continued)

Greater Houston Area,” podcast features, cross-organizational collaborations, newsletters, and three triumphant events. This altruistic approach opened the door to subsidence education and the importance of preventing further subsidence in

the greater Houston area. Its success was measured by increased website and social media metrics, as well as the connections made, stories shared, and memories created throughout the year-long campaign.

**Category II:
Publications: annual reports, water quality reports,
brochures, postcards, etc.**

Large Utility

Austin Water

Austin Water’s Strategic Plan

The Austin Water Strategic Plan is a public-facing publication designed to translate a yearlong, organization-wide strategic planning effort into a clear, accessible reference and accountability tool for employees, leadership, partners and the community. The plan documents Austin Water’s five long-range goals and the collaborative process that shaped them.

Developed through extensive staff and community engagement — including surveys, listening sessions, focus groups and workshops across all 10 City Council districts — the plan reflects thousands of voices. Original photography featuring employees, facilities, infrastructure and Austin’s natural environment was integrated to humanize the utility’s work and connect technical systems to the natural resource they protect.

The Strategic Plan was designed as a digital-first, accessible publication, meeting WCAG 2.1 AA standards through clear document structure, logical reading order, sufficient color contrast, legible typography and descriptive alternative text. Published on the City of Austin website, the plan was distributed through Austin Water and citywide internal communication channels.

A fully printed companion version and presentation-adapted pages extend the plan’s use in meetings and briefings. Designed as a living

reference tool, the plan supports transparency, internal alignment and long-term organizational change over the coming years.

Small Utility

Gulf Coast Authority

Gulf Coast Authority’s Clarifier

Clarifier was created to address a communications gap surrounding the complex, technical work performed by Gulf Coast Authority and its responsibility as a public authority. While GCA operates critical industrial wastewater treatment infrastructure that protects Texas waters and supports key industries, the scope, expertise, and public value of this work were not always well understood by internal staff, stakeholders, or policymakers.

In addition, GCA’s regular engagement with legislators and regulatory agencies was not consistently documented or shared as part of its broader narrative. The goal of Clarifier is to strengthen understanding of GCA’s mission, operations, and accountability through clear, accessible storytelling. Produced biannually, the publication highlights facility operations, capital projects, employee contributions, and legislative outreach, translating technical and policy focused information into practical, human centered content.

Clarifier reinforces transparency by demonstrating how GCA manages infrastructure responsibly, engages decision makers, and plans for long term

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environmental protection. Developed by the GM and CEO and led by the Communications Manager in collaboration with leadership and subject matter experts, Clarifier serves as both an internal alignment tool and an external credibility resource, reinforcing GCA's mission of Protecting the Waters of the State of Texas.

River Authorities or Water Districts

Tarrant Regional Water District

Integrated Water Supply Plan One-Pager

The Integrated Water Supply Plan one-pager translates complex 50-year water infrastructure planning into an accessible public document for North Texas residents. Facing unprecedented regional growth, 65,000 new residents annually, and limited Trinity Basin resources, TRWD needed to communicate the urgency of long-term water supply decisions to diverse audiences ranging from elected officials to everyday citizens.

This one-pager was created in-house and took 4-5 weeks to prepare. The piece balances technical accuracy with public accessibility. Clear infographics show current supply versus future need, while outlining TRWD's diversified approach from conservation to potential new reservoirs. The one-pager was meant to serve as both a standalone awareness tool and a gateway to deeper engagement, directing readers to the full executive summary via a QR code and inviting public comment.

By making 50-year infrastructure planning tangible and relevant to daily life, it bridged the gap between complex technical planning and meaningful community engagement.

Honorable Mention:

City of Irving Water Utilities

More Than a CCR: The History and Reliability Behind Irving's Drinking Water

The City of Irving's 2024 Water Quality Report was developed to meet Consumer Confidence Report requirements while also serving as a broader educational resource about the city's water system.

Irving used the CCR as an opportunity to provide deeper context about its water supply by highlighting long-term planning efforts that began in the 1950s and culminated in the delivery of raw water from Chapman Lake in 2003. An overview of Irving's raw water infrastructure, originally developed to brief new City Council members on the scale and complexity of the system, was adapted for inclusion in the report. This allowed the utility to package detailed system information in a format accessible to the general public while maintaining technical accuracy.

The report explains how Irving's raw water system spans five counties and approximately 75 miles before treatment and distribution, providing meaningful context for the water quality data presented. In addition to required quality information, the report includes sections on utility budgeting, water rates, conservation efforts, and irrigation efficiency tips.

Designed for use beyond a single reporting year, the Water Quality Report serves as an ongoing educational and outreach resource and is used in customer engagement and water quality response efforts.

(Continued)

Use #txwater26 when posting about the conference on social media.

Category III: Digital Content: websites, social media, infographics, logos, etc.

Large Utility

Austin Water

Austin Water Social Media

Water utilities across the land fear the GREASE BLOB! At Austin Water, we're on a mission to stop the blob in its greasy tracks. Using the power of social media to spread the message far and wide, we're making it clear where fats, oils, and grease belong- in the trash, not the drain!

Small Utility

City of Round Rock Public Works

City of Round Rock's Water Conservation Newsletter

Round Rock, like most of Central Texas, continues to experience rapid growth. As municipal demand grows, so does the need for conservation strategies. Education is an important conservation strategy, but it's a challenge to reach a growing and diverse audience with limited staff and limited access to social media.

While digital media is the primary communication tool, Round Rock relies on shared citywide social media channels, limiting its ability to consistently promote our conservation messaging to just a few posts a year.

To help bridge the gap, Round Rock developed a bi-monthly newsletter focused on timely information and resources aimed at promoting conservation and efficiency. The objective was to address water-use challenges, including outdoor water use, which correlates with peak demand, private-side leaks, which increase water loss, and aging or inefficient fixtures, which leads to waste.

In the newsletter, Round Rock promotes rebates on efficient water fixtures, landscaping and irrigation advice, events, and giveaways to

encourage residents to participate. This newsletter demonstrates that it successfully meets its objectives by expanding reach, engaging residents, and promoting participation in water conservation programs. The newsletter consistently achieves strong engagement, with open rates averaging 60–70 percent. Performance metrics show high interest and meaningful interaction with content.

River Authorities or Water Districts:

Tarrant Regional Water District

Capital Improvement Projects Quarterly Newsletter

TRWD's Capital Improvement Projects Update newsletter launched in May 2025 to address a critical communication gap: how to keep diverse stakeholders informed about complex infrastructure projects while maintaining transparency with the general public.

The quarterly newsletter translates technical engineering content into accessible updates, distributed via email platform (MailChimp) to customer cities, board members, contractors, leadership, etc. Created entirely in-house with bilingual delivery (English and Spanish versions starting in Q4), the newsletter achieved consistently strong performance: 45% average open rates, outperforming government sector benchmarks, with zero unsubscribes in the first edition.

By simplifying complex pipeline replacements, pump station upgrades, and multi-phase construction into digestible two-page updates with maps and visuals, we transformed complex infrastructure work into an ongoing conversation with stakeholders, building trust through consistent, accessible communication about projects critical to regional water reliability.

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Honorable Mention:

**Corpus Christi Water
CCW Employee Spotlight Social Media
Campaign**

As Corpus Christi Water navigated complex challenges, including controversial infrastructure projects and drought restrictions, the organization recognized an opportunity to reconnect with the community by highlighting the dedicated professionals behind essential water services.

The challenge was to humanize a large utility organization and remind residents that real people, their neighbors, work tirelessly to provide safe, reliable water every day. The year-long Facebook Employee Spotlight Campaign strategically positioned CCW employees as the face of the organization, showcasing the beating heart that powers the utility. By consistently sharing

employee profiles across Facebook, the campaign highlighted the diverse professionals who ensure water flows to homes and businesses, regardless of external challenges.

Each spotlight featured individual employees sharing their roles, expertise, passion for public service, and commitment to the Corpus Christi community. By putting faces and personal stories to the organization, CCW transformed from an abstract governmental entity into a team of real people whom residents could relate to, trust, and appreciate. The campaign aimed to generate positive social media impressions, shifting the conversation from controversial topics to human connection. By publicly recognizing and celebrating employees, CCW demonstrated that dedicated professionals remain focused on their mission of serving the community with excellence.

**Category IV:
Community Outreach & Education Programs:
events, curriculums, programs**

Large Utility:

**San Antonio Water System
Pipa's Big Adventure - From Sewer
Rescue to Storytime Heroine**

In 2023, SAWS received a call about a puppy trapped in a sewer pipe. Today, the story of Pipa's rescue is being used to educate our community the importance of taking care of pipes. "Pipa's Big Adventure," a published children's book, tells the story of a puppy getting lost in a sewer pipe and meeting Sewer Explorer, who guides Pipa out of the pipe while teaching readers how wipes and grease clog pipes.

To keep the community connected anytime and anyplace, SAWS created a dedicated webpage for

Pipa's educational message. The community can find a digital version of the book, available both in English and Spanish. To be inclusive for all audiences, SAWS also created an ASL version.

During the holidays, SAWS encounters more sewer spills due to grease being washed down drains. The utility created grease ads featuring Pipa, reminding customers the importance of dumping grease and wipes in the trash and not down the drain. To maintain its sewer infrastructure, SAWS's televising crew continuously monitor sewer pipes for blockages that may cause sewer spills. Pipa's message is now featured on televising trucks, further educating our customers on grease and wipes.

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Small Utility:

City of Sugar Land

Rainy's Journey: Turning Water Science into Community Storytelling

The City of Sugar Land's Rainy raindrop sticker initiative is a creative and effective water conservation outreach program that turns complex water topics into fun, approachable, and memorable messaging.

Centered on Rainy, the city's recognizable raindrop character, the program uses annually released stickers aligned with rotating exhibits at the Houston Museum of Natural Science at Sugar Land. This strategic alignment reinforces exhibit themes while introducing water conservation concepts to visitors of all ages in an engaging, accessible way.

Each year's sticker design builds on a broader water narrative—from emphasizing the value of every drop, to illustrating the water cycle, to highlighting how extreme weather affects water availability and preparedness. The initiative is a collaborative effort between the city's Utilities and Communications Departments, combining accurate educational content with strong visual design and branding.

Careful coordination ensures stickers are available throughout each exhibit's peak attendance period. The stickers are distributed during museum programs, and city-hosted activities.

Exhibit attendance reached approximately 7,700 visitors in 2023, 9,500 in 2024, and 8,000 in 2025, representing tens of thousands of direct engagement opportunities. As take-home reminders, the stickers extend learning beyond the museum visit and demonstrate how simple, creative tools can foster lasting water conservation awareness.

River Authorities or Districts:

Trinity River Authority of Texas

TRA Alligator Snapping Turtle Education

The Trinity River Authority of Texas's Alligator Snapping Turtle Education Program was developed as part of a 10-year Candidate Conservation Agreement with Assurances approved by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to proactively protect six imperiled aquatic species within the Trinity River basin, with the focus of this program being on the Alligator Snapping Turtle.

The program addresses widespread knowledge gaps surrounding alligator snapping turtle identification, threats, protected status, and conservation needs, which contribute to accidental harm, misidentification, and missed conservation opportunities.

Focused primarily on the Dallas–Fort Worth metroplex and the broader Trinity River basin, the program targets the general public, anglers, boaters, construction contractors, and staff from CCAA partner organizations. TRA implemented a multi-platform education and outreach strategy that included signage, posters, training videos, classroom-ready activities, outreach events, stickers, mirror hangers for work vehicles, and a citizen science reporting tool. These tools were intentionally designed to be scalable and usable by all CCAA partners.

Since launch, the program has reached more than 81,000 people, distributed over 3,000 educational materials, increased verified sightings, and generated strong engagement from educators, anglers, zoos, and federal partners, demonstrating measurable success in education, conservation awareness, and species protection.

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Category V:

OpEds and Features: guest editorials or columns, feature stories or series

River Authorities or Districts:

Tarrant Regional Water District TRWD Mentors, Cristo Rey Students Build Bonds for Life

TRWD's Cristo Rey feature story demonstrates strategic communications serving dual purposes: increasing internal program participation while strengthening external community relations. The professionally designed story highlights the four-year mentorship between TRWD's Jennifer Fuhrman and Cristo Rey student Gustavo Perez, who credits TRWD with shaping his career path and providing a professional family. HR approached Communications to increase departmental participation in TRWD's Cristo Rey Fort Worth College Prep partnership, which historically attracted only three departments. Each

placement requires significant commitment: 8-16 hours weekly for an entire school year, making recruitment challenging. We coordinated directly with Cristo Rey leadership, our writer handled the interviews, and our designers created a custom visual template for maximum engagement. We published the story in July 2025 on our intranet and blog, authentically showcasing program benefits through real experiences rather than corporate messaging.

Results: Department applications doubled from three to six (100% increase), representing substantial organizational capacity growth. The story reached 81% of employees internally (330 views from 407 staff) and generated 850 external blog views. Cristo Rey leadership publicly praised the feature, validating its community impact.

Category VI:

Multimedia: video and photography

Large Utility:

San Antonio Water System SAWS Heritage Series

San Antonio Water System's 2025 Heritage Month Video Series showcases employee stories through professionally produced short-form videos released during Women's History Month and Hispanic Heritage Month.

Designed to deepen community connection, this multimedia campaign shifted from traditional photo features to dynamic storytelling, allowing employees to share their experiences in their own voices. Each four-part series highlighted staff

from diverse departments, including operations, engineering, technology, and laboratory services. Every video centered around a single guiding word, such as leadership, community, or perseverance, reflecting both the employee's role and personal values.

Through this format, SAWS demonstrated that the people who serve San Antonio are also members of the very community they serve and support. The series reached tens of thousands across social media platforms, outperforming static content and generating strong engagement. Viewers responded positively, expressing pride in local public servants and connecting with the authenticity of each story.

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Internally, the campaign strengthened morale and reinforced a sense of unity among employees. This initiative established a scalable storytelling model that SAWS will continue for future Heritage Months, including Black History Month 2026.

River Authorities or Districts:

**North Texas Municipal Water District
NTMWD Imagine A Day Without
Water**

People rarely consider the source of their residential water, which can create challenges for conservation communication. The North Texas Municipal Water District recognized the need to collaborate with the cities and special utility districts we serve to create authentic, trustworthy messaging about water as a shared, finite resource to the over 2.3 million people in our service area.

During regular meetings with municipal communicators and educators, we discovered obstacles like staffing or resource limitations that made creating content difficult for some of our partners. We overcame these obstacles with a video that proved the power of collaboration.

Inspired by the Value of Water Organization’s “Imagine a Day Without Water” observance, we traveled to eleven locations to film educators, public works professionals and administrators stating how people in their city or SUD used water. An NTMWD water bottle provided a visual link as it was passed from one location to the next, beginning at our Wylie Water Treatment Plant and ending at our Rowlett Creek Wastewater Treatment Plant.

The resulting one-minute video achieved nearly 10,000 views, 226 reactions, and 29 shares across our social media and increased our reach as it was shared across our service area.

Honorable Mention:

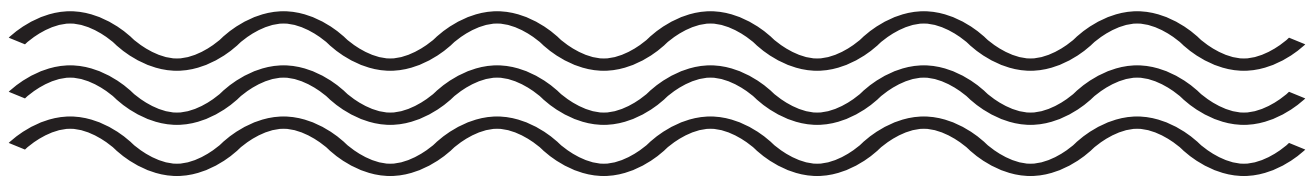
**Arlington Water Utilities
2025 Employee Spotlights**

Every month, Arlington Water Utilities uploads a reel of an original segment, Employee Spotlight, a series focused on promoting the extensive work of water professionals and enlightening local communities with an appreciation for their water utility.

The communications team of Arlington Water Utilities documented, interviewed, and edited videos that featured Arlington Water Utilities workers and the measures they take to provide the public with safe and healthy drinking water.

The Employee Spotlight videos provided insight and reflection to the residents of Arlington. In total, the videos reached more than 104,190 views in 2025 and received exceptional feedback from the public that conveyed a newfound appreciation for water workers at their local water utility.

Arlington Water Utilities emphasizes professionalism and transparency with the project by assuring the public of proper care and maintenance with their water treatment process and distribution in all aspects.



WEAT Operations Awards & Biosolids Beauty Contest Ceremony

April 29, 2026, 2:45 p.m.

Hemisfair Ballroom C 2, 3

WATER ENVIRONMENT ASSOCIATION OF TEXAS

COMMITTEE ENGAGEMENT AWARD

...recognizes a WEAT committee that reflects the highest standards of performance and impact to the organization.

Operations Challenge Committee

The WEAT Operations Challenge Committee is being honored with the inaugural WEAT Committee Engagement Award, a testament to its profound impact on the organization and the wider water environment community. Though a small committee, consisting of 14 members with five dedicated individuals on the executive team, its mission is mighty: to support water operators and continue expanding the premier professional development program across Texas.

The Operations Challenge is recognized by the Water Environment Federation as the water sector's top professional development initiative. It involves teams of water professionals training and competing in core events that simulate the real-world challenges faced daily in the field. This competition, coordinated and promoted by the committee, directly contributes to cornerstones of WEAT's mission: educating the public, providing opportunities for growth, and protecting water resources. By bringing together engineers, regulators, operators, managers, and contractors, the competition strengthens professional abilities, accelerates career growth, and promotes vital connections within the industry.

The committee's efforts have resulted in the largest regional Operations Challenge competition in the nation, hosted annually at Texas Water. This monumental undertaking requires planning nearly 10,000 square feet of competition space, coordinating dozens of vendors, and mobilizing

over 100 volunteers. The event routinely attracts over ten teams, with participants traveling from across the nation. In addition to the five standard events, the committee develops four unique competitions found only in Texas. Their success is underscored by the WEF Community, which recognizes the Texas program as one of the largest and strongest among Member Associations.

Demonstrating a continuous commitment to innovation, the committee has been instrumental in helping launch new teams across the state, including SJRA, SARA, Fort Worth, SAWS, and Webster, bringing the benefits of WEAT to the broadest possible group of clean water professionals. They have actively supported community-focused events like the H-Town Water Showdown and Opstoberfest, and introduced new initiatives such as a Young Professional's competition to foster cross-generational learning. The committee is also fiscally responsible, having been self-sustainable for over 15 years through successful fundraising to support the competition and send Texas teams to the national event at WEFTEC. Through consistent engagement and strong leadership, the WEAT Operations Challenge Committee exemplifies the highest standards of performance, setting a benchmark for excellence in the water industry.

WEAT is delighted to recognize this dedication to excellence and community building with the 2026 Committee Engagement Award.

WATER ENVIRONMENT ASSOCIATION OF TEXAS

TRENT WOODWARD PHILANTHROPY AWARD

...recognizes those operators whose dedication and professionalism inspire all those who work in the clean water sector.

Jeff Sober

Jeff Sober is a senior vice president at Garver, serving as director of water and wastewater services and as a member of the firm's Board of Directors.

A past president of the Water Environment Association of Texas, Sober has demonstrated a long-standing commitment to service and giving back to the clean water profession. As a resident of Spring Branch in the Guadalupe River Valley, he experienced the July 2025 floods first hand and felt compelled to lead a companywide GarverGives

disaster-relief and funding campaign, which raised \$41,000 in support of emergency response and recovery organizations.

Sober's career reflects a sustained dedication to community, workforce development, and the advancement of the water and wastewater industry. WEAT is proud to recognize this commitment with our 2026 Trent Woodward Philanthropy Award.

WATER ENVIRONMENT ASSOCIATION OF TEXAS

BILL TATUM OPERATIONS EXCELLENCE AWARD

...recognizes those operators whose dedication and professionalism inspire all who work on the clean water sector.

Miguel Canto Rodney Johnson Ryan Kelly

Miguel Canto

Miguel (Mike) Cantu Jr. serves as the wastewater superintendent for the City of Lubbock Water Reclamation Department. A veteran of the industry with over 13 years of hands-on experience, Cantu began his career as an apprentice operator and systematically rose through the departmental ranks. He is an exceptional clean water professional who exemplifies dedication, leadership, and technical expertise.

Cantu has demonstrated his commitment to clean water from his early career to his current supervisory role. When staffing shortages impacted the stability of the city's main wastewater facility, he stepped up without hesitation, taking on

additional responsibilities. His ability to lead under pressure ensured compliance with regulatory standards and maintained operational efficiency during a critical period, reinforcing the reliability of the wastewater system.

Cantu's innovation and technical aptitude are particularly evident in his commitment to professional growth and mastering his field. He holds a class A wastewater operator license, which is a testament to his technical proficiency and years of continuous learning. With years invested in mastering every aspect of wastewater operations, he leverages his comprehensive understanding of plant operations to lead his team in maintaining high-quality water reclamation standards for the Lubbock community.

(Continued)

Cantu's journey is a story of perseverance and service, and his embodiment of the highest standards of the profession is recognized with WEAT's Bill Tatum Operations Excellence Award.

Rodney Johnson

Rodney Johnson is an operations supervisor at the Central Wastewater Treatment Plant for Dallas Water Utilities. He holds a Texas wastewater operator license A and has over 15 years experience in the wastewater business.

He is an exceptional professional who demonstrates strong operational knowledge, technical instruction expertise, and a profound dedication to advancing the wastewater profession through education and licensing.

In his role as operations supervisor, Johnson is heavily involved in internal training and development. He has mentored over fifteen operators in the past eleven years, providing essential training on facility operations, documentation, and environmental impact assessment. This training covers a wide range of processes, including collection system lines, influent pump stations, screening and grit removal, trickling filters, activated sludge, chemical handling, mix media filters, effluent pump stations, and the rotary drum thickener.

Johnson's innovative approach and technical aptitude are particularly evident in his commitment to staff licensing and succession. He regularly participates in long-range succession planning for himself and future wastewater supervisors at CWWTP. Additionally, he actively assists plant operators and apprentices with signing up for TCEQ training and planning for TCEQ license testing.

Johnson has completed numerous high-impact education and outreach projects that directly strengthen the profession:

- He has served as a TCEQ instructor for the past two years, teaching courses like Wastewater Collections, Unit 1 and Unit 2

Wastewater Treatment, and Activated Sludge, to prepare fellow operators for licensing.

- He presented on a WEAT webinar regarding succession planning.
- He has participated in over thirty plant tours over the past four years, facilitating and leading tours for students and the public to promote awareness and education.

Ryan Kelly

Ryan Kelly is the operations manager at the Dallas Central Wastewater Treatment Plant for Dallas Water Utilities. In this role, he manages approximately thirty-seven people, and is responsible for hiring, performance evaluations, and training. He is an exceptionally experienced operator, with strong operational knowledge and leadership experience in capital planning, project design, and technology implementation.

Kelly has been a part of the CWWTP team for over fifteen years, having risen from an apprentice operator to operations manager. In his current role, he works with both operations and maintenance staff to ensure both teams are aware of process changes and shutdowns. He also serves as a water utility manager and holds a class A Wastewater treatment operator license.

Kelly's technical aptitude is particularly evident in his commitment to long-range success and staff training. He participates in capital planning, project design, construction, and implementation. He develops and implements long-range plans, programs, and schedules for operational efficiency and successful maintenance projects at the plant.

Kelly has completed numerous high-impact improvements at CWWTP that directly strengthen process control and operational decision-making:

- He sets up multiple training events with engineers, suppliers, and manufacturers to ensure his operators are always aware of changes in regulations, equipment, and processes.

(Continued)

- He regularly provides public tours of the plant to both citizens, students, and public leaders, always looking for ways to better explain the plant and its treatment process.
- He worked with a team of professionals to ensure a smooth full-day Membrane and Mudbugs WEAT North Texas Event training event at CWWTP (in 2023-2025).

These contributions demonstrate analytical discipline and a commitment to continuous improvement. Kelly invests in his team, hiring, promoting, and training individuals to support current and future plant needs.

Kelly's colleagues note his unwavering dedication, innovative thinking, and ability to inspire and guide teams. His ability to engage constructively with engineers, operators, and contractors alike fosters a sense of shared purpose. He is a strong, confident, humble person who cares about the overall world of wastewater treatment. WEAT is delighted to recognize him for his commitment to operational excellence, as a Bill Tatum Operations Excellence Awardee.

Aaron Legako

Aaron Legako is the lead operator at the Peninsula Wastewater Treatment Plant for the Upper Trinity Regional Water District. He is responsible for ensuring stable biological treatment, consistent effluent quality, and reliable regulatory compliance at a critical regional facility. He represents the operator of the future, blending strong process knowledge with deep expertise in chemistry, biology, and modern data analysis.

Legako has been an integral part of the operations team at UTRWD since 2021, advancing from entry level to a B licensed operator in four years.

Prior to joining UTRWD, Legako spent seven years working as a research assistant in an academic biochemistry laboratory at UT Southwestern Medical Center, supporting laboratory research through microbiological and molecular work.

This experience, combined with his Bachelor of Science degree in biology with a concentration in microbiology from The University of Texas at Austin, has given him a unique technical foundation that he applies every day in the wastewater industry. In addition to his wastewater treatment operator license, he is also a licensed tradesman plumber in the State of Texas.

Legako's innovation and technical aptitude are particularly evident in his self-taught coding abilities. He learned Python independently and leveraged this skill to revolutionize UTRWD's data analytic program. His work — which began as a small data request project — has evolved into an advanced tool being implemented across all UTRWD treatment facilities to enhance operational efficiency and reduce time and cost.

Legako has completed numerous high-impact improvements at the Peninsula Plant that directly strengthen process control, laboratory consistency, and operational decision-making:

- He introduced the use of open-ended pipettes to obtain more representative solids samples, improving laboratory accuracy for TSS and VSS analysis.
- He developed advanced calculation tools for essential parameters like SVI and cake tons, eliminating formula errors and providing operators with immediate, informed process guidance.
- He built a sludge-age calculator that adjusts based on which treatment structures are in service. This tool identified excessively high sludge age, which directly supported the operational decision to take an old plant offline to restore biological performance.

These contributions demonstrate analytical discipline and a commitment to continuous improvement. As lead operator, Legako also invests in his team, training junior operators with clarity and patience and mentoring interns through hands-on learning experiences.

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Legako's colleagues note his tireless commitment to operational excellence and his high-level work ethic, which is raising the performance of his peers. His ability to combine science, mathematics, and coding into daily operations has established him as a leader who thinks ahead rather than simply reacting to challenges. Legako is an active member of the Texas Water Utilities Association, and he

maintains a continued commitment to professional growth and advancing the field, along with a quiet pace and continued learning outside of work.

WEAT is delighted to recognize him as one of our 2026 Class of Bill Tatum Operations Excellence Awardees.

WATER ENVIRONMENT ASSOCIATION OF TEXAS
SUSAN B. HIER AWARD FOR EXCELLENCE
IN EDUCATION & LICENSING

...recognizes the achievements and contributions made in the field of education and professional advancement of operators within the state of Texas.

Leonard Leinfelder

For more than forty years, Leonard Leinfelder has committed his career to advancing the education, training, and professional licensing of water and wastewater operators across Texas. His dedication to operator development and his leadership in strengthening the state's technical training standards make him a standout in the industry.

As a certified water utilities instructor and long-time Texas Commission on Environmental Quality approved trainer, Leinfelder has personally taught and mentored countless operators, helping them advance their licenses through rigorous, hands-on education. His instruction blends the science behind process control with the skills of plant operation, empowering operators to not only understand treatment processes but to make confident, data-driven adjustments that optimize system performance.

Leinfelder has also shaped the framework of operator education in Texas, serving as curriculum development coordinator for the Texas Water

Utilities Association and later as water program manager at the University of Texas at Arlington, where he designed statewide training materials foundational to the certification process.

His eight years on the TCEQ Water Utilities Operator Licensing Advisory Committee, which included two years as chair of a joint subcommittee with the Public Drinking Water Division, led to the refinement of testing materials, training requirements, and licensing standards that continue to influence operator credentials. As a subject matter expert for TCEQ, he played a critical role in developing the Directed Assistance Modules, particularly DAM 5 on chloramine optimization. His contributions have advanced both the technical integrity and accessibility of operator training across Texas.

Beyond the classroom, Leinfelder has given decades of service to the Water Environment Association of Texas. As chair and long-serving member of the WEAT Safety Committee (2001-

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2026), he helped organize hands-on safety workshops and training events at the Texas Water conference, creating immersive learning experiences that connected technical expertise with safe field practices.

Additionally, his dedication has continued through active involvement in the WEAT Operations Challenge Program, where he develops event materials and serves as a mentor to teams, promoting industry excellence, teamwork, and pride among operators. His work in Operations

Challenge is a testament to his dedication to elevating others and promoting industry excellence.

Leinfelder's career reflects the values recognized by the Susan B. Hier Excellence in Education and Licensing Award. His commitment to operator education, mentorship, and leadership has strengthened Texas' water and wastewater workforce, and ensured that the state's licensing and training programs remain among the strongest in the nation.

WATER ENVIRONMENT ASSOCIATION OF TEXAS

LEE BOHME OUTSTANDING PRETREATMENT PROFESSIONAL AWARD

...recognizes the achievements and contributions made in the field of education and professional advancement of operators within the state of Texas.

Janet Sims

Janet Sims is a project manager with Mead & Hunt. A highly accomplished professional with over 30 years of experience in the water and wastewater industry, she has been involved with regulatory studies concerning wastewater discharges, water and wastewater laboratory practices, and the implementation and development of industrial pretreatment programs.

She has been a dedicated resource for numerous Texas utilities, assisting them in navigating complex pretreatment challenges. Throughout her tenure, Sims has managed or provided technical support for an impressive portfolio of municipal wastewater permits, ranging in size from 10,000 to 200 million gallons per day.

A key area of her specialization is her deep understanding of how the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality processes permit applications and assesses pretreatment program modifications. Her expertise is coupled with a strong reputation for working effectively and collaboratively with TCEQ staff, ensuring she stays informed of the latest in TCEQ procedures, policies, and water quality standards.

She is known for her integrity, professionalism, and "real world, common-sense approach to tackling regulatory issues," according to a colleague, which has made her a trusted expert in the field.

Her technical achievements are significant and numerous. Sims has been responsible for nearly 200 permit applications, many of which involved complex technical and legal issues.

She has conducted hundreds of evaluations of effluent data, focusing on toxic materials, total dissolved solids, metals, and other pollutants of concern. This work has been critical in ensuring permit compliance and in the determination of technically based local limits — an integral part of an approved pretreatment program.

Furthermore, Sims possesses decades of experience in the implementation of Texas surface water quality standards and the development and implementation of industrial pretreatment programs, including the development of site-specific water quality standards for industrial users.

WATER ENVIRONMENT ASSOCIATION OF TEXAS

WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT AWARD

...recognizes an individual advancing workforce development programs in Texas that effectively attract, train and /or retain water sector workers.

Zachary Jackson

Zachary Jackson is a highly accomplished wastewater operations professional whose career is defined by a deep commitment to technical excellence and the robust development of the Texas water and wastewater workforce. Currently serving as the operations training and development manager at the North Texas Municipal Water District, he oversees critical training initiatives designed to cultivate the next generation of skilled operators.

His foundation is rigorously academic and practical, holding a Bachelor of Science in microbiology and biology from the University of Texas at Arlington. This blend of scientific expertise, coupled with extensive operational field experience, provides him with a unique ability to translate complex theoretical principles into practical, accessible, and high-impact learning for operators across all proficiency levels.

Jackson began his professional journey at the Trinity River Authority Central Regional Wastewater System. He subsequently advanced his career at NTMWD's South Mesquite Regional WWTP, progressing from operator I to operations supervisor II.

In his current role as operations training and development manager, Jackson leverages his comprehensive background to lead the district's essential licensing courses, competency programs, and advanced training curricula. He is directly responsible for developing and teaching specialized coursework in areas such as biological nutrient removal (BNR), activated sludge optimization, disinfection protocols, and utility calculations. This work is pivotal to NTMWD's commitment

to attracting new talent, strengthening the technical competency of existing staff, and ensuring long-term workforce retention, thereby fostering a sustainable water sector career path. His mentorship and leadership have created an environment at NTMWD where staff are actively engaged, learn, and grow.

Beyond his formal responsibilities at NTMWD, Jackson is a dedicated and long-time leader within the Water Environment Association of Texas. His influence is most prominently felt within the Operations Challenge program, where he has demonstrated unwavering commitment for years.

For eight years, he led the celebrated "Centrifugal Force" Operations Challenge team as captain, a role that involved mentoring, coaching, and motivating his peers to achieve technical excellence. His contributions to the competition have ensured that it remains a meaningful learning platform, going far beyond a mere contest by elevating the technical rigor and educational value of the event.

Now, he is transitioning to a broader leadership role as the incoming process control coordinator for Texas Operations Challenge events, continuing to share his knowledge and inspire operators across the state. He has also served on the WEAT Operations Challenge Committee and the Basic Wastewater Course Working Group.

A standout example of Jackson's dedication to workforce development is his instrumental contribution to WEAT's 20-hour Basic Wastewater Course. His contribution to this project extended far beyond what was formally requested. He hosted and personally guided the filming of multiple

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course chapters at NTMWD facilities, working closely with the production team to ensure the most essential and relevant operational processes were accurately captured.

Crucially, he independently reviewed all chapter content to verify that it met the rigorous technical expectations for the state's D-level license. This proactive step, which he undertook of his own accord, ensured that future operators — many of whom would be entering the workforce for the first time — would receive instruction that is both accessible and fully aligned with state licensing standards. His passion for helping young people

enter the water sector was evident through his thoughtful suggestions and extra content offerings, ultimately making the Basic Wastewater Course stronger, more accurate, and more engaging.

Jackson's leadership, dedication, and passion for developing people have made a real, demonstrable, and lasting impact on workforce resilience in Texas. His actions not only raise the standard for training and education but also serve as an inspiration to all those involved with WEAT. He is an outstanding and deserving recipient of the WEAT Workforce Development Award.

WATER ENVIRONMENT ASSOCIATION OF TEXAS INDUSTRIAL WASTEWATER TREATMENT PLANT OF THE YEAR AWARD

...recognizes an industrial waste treatment plant in Texas that has consistently exhibited outstanding performance of daily activities beyond the normal call of duty.

40-Acre Industrial Wastewater Treatment Facility Gulf Coast Authority

The Gulf Coast Authority 40-Acre Industrial Wastewater Treatment Facility is recognized for its operational consistency and commitment to water quality protection.

The facility serves as a regional collection and treatment center, handling wastewater from various industrial users in its service area. The 40A facility also receives wastewater from a nearby non-hazardous leachate source and a non-hazardous sludge disposal unit.

The treatment process at 40A employs an oxygen activated sludge process. The facility maintains a treatment capacity of 15.7 MGD and operates with an average daily flow of approximately 7.53 MGD. The staff at 40A consists of 12 personnel dedicated to operations, maintenance, and administration. The

operational team includes two licensed wastewater operators from the TCEQ: one holding a class B license and one a class C License, with additional staff trained in operations and maintenance activities.

The 40A facility has demonstrated a strong record of compliance, with no permit violations recorded over the past 24 months. This performance earned the facility a NACWA Gold Peak Performance Award, which recognizes 100 percent permit compliance for an entire year. The facility maintains a complete system of historical records, annual reports, and supporting documentation.

Safety is a core component of the facility's operations, supported by a documented and active safety program. The staff's commitment to safety

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is supported by the Gulf Coast Authority's senior leadership. Although the 40-Acre facility does not utilize a full-time safety professional, the entire staff is committed to maintaining a safe work environment.

The training program uses the corporate program alongside third-party training from organizations such as the Houston Area Safety Council and other specialized training providers. This collective commitment has resulted in an excellent safety record: the 40-Acre facility recorded zero reportable

or recordable incidents in the past 12 months, and recently achieved nine consecutive years with no lost-time incidents.

The 40-Acre facility's operational performance, safety record, and dedicated staff contribute to its selection as the Industrial Wastewater Treatment Plant of the Year. The facility's work supports the mission of protecting the waters of the State of Texas through environmentally sound, economical, and technologically advanced wastewater and water management practices.

WATER ENVIRONMENT ASSOCIATION OF TEXAS

MUNICIPAL WASTEWATER TREATMENT PLANT OF THE YEAR Category 1 (less than 1 MGD)

...recognizes a municipal wastewater treatment plant in Texas that has consistently exhibited outstanding performance of daily activities beyond the normal call of duty.

4S Ranch Water Reclamation Facility Guadalupe Blanco River Authority

The 4S Ranch Water Reclamation Facility, operated by Guadalupe Blanco River Authority, is celebrated for its exceptional operations and vital community service. Since its startup in 2017, the facility has consistently demonstrated unparalleled performance, producing high-quality effluent that exceeds Type I reuse standards for Comal County residents.

This commitment to excellence is reflected in its stellar regulatory record: the 4S Ranch WWTP has achieved zero reportable lost-time incidents and zero permit compliance violations within the past two years. Furthermore, it has consistently achieved its stringent 5/5/2/0.5 cBOD₅, TSS, ammonia, and total phosphorus permit limits,

solidifying its standing as a top-tier water resource management facility.

Beyond compliance, the plant provides a reliable water resource for nearby public spaces and residential developments, including the 4S Ranch and Hidden Trails neighborhoods. This success is a direct result of its professional and highly qualified staff, led by Division Manager Cecil Holliday, a double-A licensed operator, and Chief Operator Josh Chaney, a double-B licensed operator, whose dedication ensures the facility remains an invaluable asset to the community. WEAT is proud to recognize the 4S Ranch facility as the 2026 Category 1 Wastewater Treatment Plant of the Year.

WATER ENVIRONMENT ASSOCIATION OF TEXAS

MUNICIPAL WASTEWATER TREATMENT PLANT OF THE YEAR Category 2 (1 MGD to <15 MGD)

...recognizes a municipal wastewater treatment plant in Texas that has consistently exhibited outstanding performance of daily activities beyond the normal call of duty.

McAllen North Wastewater Treatment Plant McAllen Public Utility

The McAllen North Wastewater Treatment Plant, operated by McAllen Public Utility, is the premier example of advanced wastewater management in South Texas. Originally constructed in 1987 with a capacity of 4 million gallons per day, the facility has undergone several significant upgrades to meet the needs of its growing community, achieving its current capacity of 15 MGD.

The plant utilizes a robust Extended Aeration activated sludge treatment process, ensuring consistent, high-quality effluent standards. A commitment to operational excellence is evident in its technology, including a Supervisory Control and Data Acquisition system for precise process control.

A key 2018 enhancement was the installation of an Aqua-Aerobic cloth filter system, which has been instrumental in maintaining a strong compliance record, with no permit violations reported in the past five years.

The NWWTP is a regional leader in water conservation through its pioneering reclaimed water program. It currently generates approximately 3.5 MGD of Type II reclaimed water for industrial use and about 1 MGD of Type I reclaimed water. This Type I water is a source of pride, as McAllen is the first city south of San Antonio to utilize it for residential irrigation in master-planned communities like Tres Lagos, as well as for the Texas A&M University campus in McAllen.

Underpinning this successful operation is a dedicated team of 15 TCEQ-licensed operators and two lab technicians, who collectively possess 278 years of experience. Their professionalism has also resulted in an exemplary safety record, with no lost-time incidents reported in the last three years. The team at McAllen North set the benchmark for the clean water sector in South Texas, and the plant is WEAT's 2026 Category 2 Wastewater Treatment Plant of the Year.

WATER ENVIRONMENT ASSOCIATION OF TEXAS

MUNICIPAL WASTEWATER TREATMENT PLANT OF THE YEAR Category 3 (>15 MGD)

...recognizes a municipal wastewater treatment plant in Texas that has consistently exhibited outstanding performance of daily activities beyond the normal call of duty.

Leon Creek Water Recycling Center San Antonio Water System

The San Antonio Water System Leon Creek Water Recycling Center is a conventional activated sludge facility with a permitted capacity of 46 million gallons per day, serving western San Antonio. The plant consistently demonstrates exceptional performance, achieving a remarkable reduction of 99% or more in effluent discharge permit parameters regulated by the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality, including carbonaceous biochemical oxygen demand, total suspended solids, and ammonia nitrogen. Leon Creek consistently exceeds state standards for effluent quality.

Leon Creek is staffed by a dedicated team of 20 operators that provide 24/7 coverage, including four class A licensed operators, six class B licensed operators, five class C licensed operators, and four operators in training. This diverse licensing structure reflects a strong commitment to operational excellence and the continuous professional development of the plant operations workforce. The Leon Creek plant equipment is maintained by four mechanics that work hand-in-hand with the operators and address work orders expeditiously.

Leon Creek maintains impeccable effluent quality, and provides recycled water to customers across San Antonio, ranging from important industrial users such as Toyota Truck Manufacturing to river augmentation in the iconic San Antonio Riverwalk. Another beneficial use of Leon Creek

effluent is the Mitchell Lake Wetlands. The team of operators at Leon Creek coordinates with the National Audubon Society to maintain water levels and water quality at Mitchell Lake, one of the most important wetlands habitats in North America. This 600-acre lake offers a unique opportunity to view nearly every migratory bird species in the United States. The Mitchell Lake Audubon Center estimates that as many as 98.5% of all migratory American bird species head to the Texas coast each winter, and Mitchell Lake and the associated wetlands are one of the last roosting grounds north of the coast. As a result, the area is teeming with birds of all species.

Through teamwork and hard work, Leon Creek reached a new level in energy efficiency in 2025. By analyzing flows and predicting ammonia spikes, the aeration strategy has been modified to utilize only two blowers instead of three for the activated sludge process. Thanks to the vigilance of the Leon Creek staff, observations in plant operation, testing and dissolved oxygen readings have increased the efficiency of biological treatment. From November 2025 to January 2026, Leon Creek reduced blower energy consumption by 32.3%, saving over \$1,000 per day.

For exemplary performance, Leon Creek received the NACWA Gold Peak Performance Award in 2023 and NACWA Silver Peak Performance Award in 2022. As the Leon Creek WRC continues to serve the San Antonio community,

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it remains a model of efficiency and reliability in wastewater treatment. By maintaining high standards of effluent quality and embracing energy savings, Leon Creek not only protects the water environment but also supports the overall mission

of SAWS in delivering Sustainable, Affordable Water Services for the community. WEAT is proud to recognize the team at Leon Creek as our 2026 Category 3 Municipal Wastewater Treatment Plant of the Year.

WATER ENVIRONMENT ASSOCIATION OF TEXAS

OUTSTANDING OPERATOR OF THE YEAR

...recognizes a wastewater treatment plant operator (municipal or industrial) in the State of Texas who has demonstrated outstanding professionalism at his/her facility and has performed his/her duties tirelessly and with dedication to the betterment of the water environment.

Caeleb A. Butler

Caeleb A. Butler is the plant manager at the City of Garland's Duck Creek Regional Wastewater Treatment Plant. His journey in the profession reflects a story of continuous growth and commitment to excellence, which has culminated in his current position as the youngest plant manager in the Texas clean water sector.

Butler's expertise and leadership were critical in a remarkable turnaround at the Duck Creek WWTP. At the outset of his tenure, the plant was in need of both rehabilitation and staff alignment. Through his systematic data analysis and process optimization, he has spent nearly a year implementing changes to improve both the facility's condition and the staff's morale.

His management and procedural adjustments have led to measurable benefits in efficiency and reliability, most notably improving effluent quality to 98.6% removal efficiency for total suspended solids and ammonia. His hands-on experience and forward-thinking approach to operations have ensured significant facility performance improvements.

In addition to his technical expertise, Butler's leadership philosophy centers on mentoring and

training, viewing every challenge as a teaching opportunity. He is a TCEQ-certified instructor and has developed and taught courses that help both new and experienced operators expand their technical and operational understanding. His colleagues regard him as an exceptional manager who provides clear direction and fosters a work environment built on trust, shared accountability, and pride.

Butler's dedication to service extends into the broader professional community. He is a longtime participant in the Operations Challenge program, as a competitor, mentor, judge, and now a competition coordinator at Texas Water. In this capacity, he is part of the organizing team for this unique professional & competitive event that promotes technical excellence across Texas' clean water sector. He also engages the public through outreach efforts, from high school job fairs to community conversations, where his ability to communicate treatment processes to nonprofessionals helps strengthen trust between utilities and their communities.

His strong character and work ethic are reflected in his ability to inspire those around him and his pursuit of professional growth. Colleagues note

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that “Despite his young age, he demonstrates a maturity, confidence, and mentoring ability that many take decades to develop. His commitment to supporting and developing those around him sets him apart as not just a manager, but a true leader.”

For his technical skills, his leadership in improving plant operations, and his commitment to professional excellence and education, Caeleb A. Butler is WEAT’s 2026 Outstanding Operator of the Year.

Gavel Passing Ceremony
Wednesday, April 29, 6:15 p.m.
The Espee

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to all our awardees!

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