Droplets

A publication of the City of Atlanta Department of Watershed Management

Issue #2

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AUA honors mayor, commissioner

The hits just keep on comin' for Mayor Shirley Franklin and Commissioner Jack Ravan, who are gaining a nationwide reputation as watershed pioneers. The American Underground Construction Association is the latest organization to pay tribute to their hard work on the City's behalf, naming them co-recipients of its award for Outstanding Planning for Underground Projects.

The group pointed to their "innovative and visionary Watershed Management Project," which it called "a complex project to construct a world-class water system." The award recognizes significant achievements and individuals in the U.S. underground construction industry.

After a solicitation of nominations from the group's membership, the 2004 Awards Committee, chaired by Parsons Brinckerhoff Vice President Thomas Payton, recommended the recipients, which were unanimously approved by the AUA Board. The award will be presented at AUA's annual conference to be held in Atlanta next month. Mayor Franklin has been tapped to give the keynote speech at the conference.

AUA is an organization of professionals involved in the planning, design, development, construction and use of underground facilities. It serves as an information clearinghouse on underground infrastructure and related issues and is the official United States Member-Nation representative to the International Tunneling Association.

Department signs seniors up for rate discounts

Sarah Grimes and Ismail Abukhdier see all the comings and goings in City Hall. That's because the two have manned a table in a corner of the City Hall atrium floor every day since the beginning of February, accepting applications for the City's Low-Income Senior Citizen Discount on water/sewer bills.

Ratepayers who are 65 and older are eligible for the discount upon proof of age, residence and an annual household income of less than $25,000. The City Council passed the 30 percent discount in January as part of its rate hike package. Sarah joined the Department's customer service team on Feb. 3, day two of the campaign.

"I've only seen my desk once," she said of her first three weeks on the job. Ismail and Sarah, Marie Brown and Wayne Moore have rotated with part-time assistance from others to serve about 100 applicants each day, discussing the policy's requirements and reviewing each application.

When a second table, manned by Diana Edwards and Julia Olagbegi, was set up to help out, the group received as many as 189 applications in a single day. "Not rain nor sleet nor snow has kept them away," Ismail says. "One morning snow was falling outside, and the people beat us here. They were waiting on us. Some days we don't get to go upstairs."

Sarah Grimes and Ismail Abukhdier haven't seen much of their desks since the City started signing up applicants for its Low-Income Senior Citizen discount.

Goodwill honors wastewater customer service representative

Linda Crossland credits her co-workers for helping with her remarkable recovery.

When Linda Crossland was lying in her hospital bed, she had no way of knowing that her life was about to take a serious turn for the better. Linda, a customer service rep in the Bureau of Wastewater Collection and Treatment, was recovering from severe injuries sustained when her car was broadsided. She had been laid off from her job as a telecommunications specialist, programming ticketing machines used by major airlines, and she didn't know how she was going to provide for her two sons. It would have been enough to send the perkiest of people spiraling into depression. But Linda was different.

A long-time member of the Salvation Army, Linda turned to her network of friends, who put her in touch with Goodwill Industries, which was running an intensive 12-week customer relations training program called Office Tech. After her recovery, she threw herself into the program, and that's when she met John Frase. John, an employee with the Bureau, was speaking to Goodwill's Employment Advisory Council when he picked Linda out of the crowd. "How would you like to come and do an internship with the City?" he asked her.

Linda jumped at the chance, even though, as she says, "I didn't know one thing about wastewater treatment and collection." She did, however, know about computers, and her friendly personality was tailor-made for the often difficult job of customer relations. She threw herself into the internship, all the while dealing with the residual pain and migraines resulting from the accident. "I walked all over the yard to learn the business," she says. "Mr. [Lorenzo] Callahan taught me about sewers. Everyone helped." Three months after the internship began, John broke the good news to her. "You're about to be hired!" he said.

"I cried and cried," Linda says. She was the first Goodwill intern ever offered a permanent position with the City. It was a move that turned out to be as good for the City as it was for Linda.

"She personifies what customer service is all about," praises Bob King, the Bureau's Deputy Commissioner.

"It is because of people like her that the City of Atlanta can be proud," says Marilyn Sims, manager of the Goodworks! Program at the Atlanta Workforce Development Agency.

The compliments go both ways. "He supported me through the entire process," Linda says of Bob. "He'd always stop and ask, 'How are things going?' and come and pat me on the shoulder. I have the highest admiration for him." Linda also commends John, who, she says, encouraged her to work with other managers to learn about wastewater.

Linda's pride in her job is matched only by her pride in her two boys: Chance, 24, an Emory graduate just deployed by the Army to Walter Reed Hospital with the goal of becoming a neurologist; and Darryl, 21, who plays 16 musical instruments and is studying at London's Cambridge University this summer before heading to the University of Georgia. "I think they are surprised after everything," she says. "For me to be happy, helpful and balanced means a lot to them."

Goodwill also noticed her progress. The organization voted Linda Employee of the Year and is sending her on another great adventure. This June, on behalf of Goodwill, she will address the U.S. Senate in Washington, D.C., to speak about the Office Tech program and about her job in Atlanta. "I will talk about how anyone can overcome obstacles," she says. "All it takes is perseverance, patience and the support of the people around you."

City, Georgia Tech join forces to create infrastructure center

With its overhaul of its water and wastewater systems, Atlanta is in the midst of the most extensive engineering operation it has ever undertaken. Georgia Tech enjoys a nationwide reputation for excellence in engineering education. A partnership just made sense.

The idea came about when Mayor Shirley Franklin created the Clough Commission, named after Tech President Wayne Clough, to offer advice on how the City could best meet the requirements of the Consent Decrees. It grew into the City of Atlanta-Georgia Tech Center for Urban Infrastructure Systems. According to Thomas Bourne, the Department's Water Scientist and the City's point person for the collaboration, the Center Initiative, as it's called, will be directed toward the engineering, operation, management, design and evaluation of a range of topics, including:

Thomas Bourne is heading up the City's Center Initiative efforts.

- Water resources and quality engineering;
- Watershed and infrastructure management;
- Potable, storm- and wastewater management;
- Asset and systems management;
- GIS and surface/subsurface system management;
- Transportation systems engineering, design and management;
- Homeland security and defense; and
- Urban and land-use planning and management.

The Center will seek out industrial, municipal and academic partners and look at establishing projects directed toward current and emerging tasks critical to the City's projects in land, air and water management, and infrastructure enhancement. Importantly, Tech and the City will cooperate to pursue funding, both of specific tasks and of projects with broader research implications.

The Center will be located on campus, and an oversight committee will be appointed by Georgia Tech. Watershed Management will be intimately involved with the Center. The various bureaus already have submitted their wish lists for projects involving everything from billing software and filter media analysis to corrosion control and hydraulic studies.

The agreement between Mayor Franklin and Georgia Tech goes to the City Council for approval in April. For more information, contact Dr. Bourne at (404)330-6824.

Department hosts rain garden workshop

Have you ever been frustrated by having to water your lawn only days after a rainstorm? Well, it may be time to consider replacing some of your grass with a rain garden.

Rain gardens are landscaped areas designed to collect and use rainwater. They are great ways to reclaim rainwater from a downspout or a driveway, helping cut your water bill during Atlanta's hot-weather months.

The Department is sponsoring a "Rain Gardens: Retain Your Rain" Workshop to help residents interested in developing their own water-friendly landscapes. Alfie Vick, an assistant professor in the University of Georgia's College of Environment and Design and Vice President of Ecos Environmental Design in Atlanta, will host the free workshop. Attendees will learn how to select plants to enhance property value, cut water bills and beautify their landscapes while helping control stormwater runoff.

The workshop will be held on Saturday, April 17, at 10 a.m. in City Hall. For more information, contact Diane Badger, (404) 330-6817.

Volunteers needed to staff Public Works conference

The American Public Works Association is coming to Atlanta, and the Department is looking to make the organization, which represents public works departments across the country, feel at home. To do that,we need volunteers — some 400 of them.

Volunteers will need to commit four consecutive hours on one day between Sept. 12 and Sept. 15. They will receive a shirt, a hat, lunch and access to the exhibitor floor during that day. Duties primarily include monitoring technical sessions.

If you'd like to help out during the conference (Sept. 12-15), please contact Steve Vance at (404) 642-0872.

And remember, May 16-22 is National Public Works Week. Go build something.

Reading, 'riting, 'rithmatic and resources

School program teaches kids the wisdom of water-wise landscaping

Above, Councilmember Jim Maddox, Principal Patricia Hall and Mayor Shirley Franklin join kids from Kimberly Elementary to celebrate the groundbreaking for the school's garden. Right, the Mayor presents a check on behalf of the City, and, below right, breaks ground for the project.

"Urbanization and industrialization have taken nature-based habitats away from children." That's what Mary Rivkin, a professor and expert in early childhood education, said, and it's a fact that bothers not only the City and the Department, but the federal Environmental Protection Agency, the state Environmental Protection Division and the National Wildlife Federation (NWF). So, the four groups have formed a partnership to create a Schoolyard Habitat program. Under the program, which is an outgrowth of NWF's Backyard Wildlife Habitat program, the City awarded a $500 grant to Kimberly Elementary School to create a demonstration pollinator garden that will incorporate xeriscaping and rain garden elements to attract butterflies and hummingbirds.

The City's grant will cover the cost of child-sized trowels and gloves, metal plant labels, a hummingbird feeder, plants, and mulch and compost. EPA and EPD also are donating funds to cover NWF staff time, student lessons and supplies that students can take home to create their own Backyard Wildlife Habitats. Students and teachers will work with the Parent Teachers Association to encourage homeowners to develop xeriscape gardens and landscaping that require less water. Water conservation saves money and preserves our water resources.

Mayor Shirley Franklin presented the City's check to the school at a March 10 ceremony. For more information on the program, contact Marilyn Johnson, (404) 330-6755.

Department institutes security measures

If a terrorist or psychotic criminal really, really wanted to cause significant harm to a good number of Atlantans, he or she might start with the City's drinking water. It would not have been a difficult undertaking, posing as an employee or a contractor to gain access to critical facilities.

That was the motivation behind a recent policy change that requires employees of water treatment and reclamation plants to undergo criminal background checks as a condition of employment. Prompted by the Bioterrorism and Public Health Act of 2002, the City is about to embark on a $28 million campaign to improve security at its critical water facilities. And City officials understood that it wouldn't make sense to secure their facilities only to allow potential bad guys to walk through the front door as employees and independent contractors.

Employment background check expenses are picked up by the Department, which has put strategic protections in place to prevent the misuse of personal information and to ensure the rights of those undergoing the checks. For more information on the Department's security policy, contact Marie Shadden at (404) 330-6073.

Spotlight on Kike Ojo: Environmental Justice

The concept of environmental justice is relatively recent. An offshoot of broader civil rights goals, it is a philosophy of fairness designed to guarantee that facilities affecting environmental health not infringe on the public health of underprivileged and often voiceless communities. In Atlanta, Kike Ojo provides that voice.

Kike, who joined the Department in October as the City's first ever Environmental Justice Officer, is responsible for the formation and development of the Office of Environmental Justice. She was hired to raise awareness of the issues and create an ethic of environmental justice throughout the Department and will be directing the office's day-to-day functions and conducting its long-term strategic planning. Her duties include overseeing environmental justice compliance, community outreach, communication, education and training and budgetary matters.

Kike earned a Masters Degree in Sociology and Equity Studies and a Bachelors in Education from the University of Toronto. She also holds a Bachelors Degree in Sociology from Ontario, Canada's McMaster University and is a member of the Measures of Racism Working Group at the Centers for Disease Control and the Environmental Justice and Health Disparities Working Group for the National Children's Study of Health, Growth and the Environment. In 2000, she won the prestigious Lincoln Alexander Community Award (named for Ontario's first black lieutenant governor) for leadership on racial discrimination issues in the province.

A native of Toronto, Kike lived in Canada until accepting the City's employment offer.

"Equity and social justice are my lifelong passions," she says. "I am thrilled to be doing what I love to do every day in such a vibrant and promising city. Because of the vision of Commissioner Ravan, the Department is bringing equity and social justice into the environmental arena — a critical step toward making Atlanta the 'best in class' city it is destined to be."

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Back Page Commentary

Public involvement is key to gaining public trust

During my tenure as an Atlanta City Councilmember, we have made several crucial decisions regarding water and sewer. We took back water services from United Water, and we made the difficult, but necessary, decision to raise water/sewer rates in order to complete mandated upgrades to the sewer system.

It's very important that we keep our residents informed and updated on these significant issues. I attend or host several meetings in my district, and I have seen instances when the residents don't have an understanding about or knowledge of impending sewer projects — such as the Stockade Sewer Separation Project — or information regarding the water/sewer rate increases.

For the past 18 months, I've been working very closely with William Horton of the Public Involvement Office in Watershed Management. Mr. Horton attends meetings in my district and explains everything in terms that people can understand in a non-threatening, non-technical way. He works very hard to keep the citizens in District One updated on the Stockade project and water/sewer rate increases. In addition to attending public meetings, Mr. Horton prepares and sends out a quarterly newsletter, notifies residents of impending work in their neighborhoods and personally addresses residents concerns.

Commissioner Jack Ravan and the Department of Watershed Management have done a great job since we took back the drinking water system last year. During that time, I've been receiving nothing but compliments about the quality of customer service.

For instance, Jim Gingles on Woodland Avenue in southeast Atlanta usually calls me when he has a problem regarding water and sewer issues, and I work with Watershed Management to address his concerns. Mr. Gingles called me recently to let me know he called the Clean Water Atlanta Help Line with a problem and, within a couple of days, the work was done. He was impressed that he didn't have to call me first and was very appreciative of the work.

I want to thank everyone in Watershed Management who takes his/her job seriously and follows up with citizens when they call. Without the citizens, none of us would have jobs. When one employee takes the time to help our citizens, that employee makes the entire City look good. That's the experience the resident walks away with.

— Carla Smith

Back Page Commentary represents the opinion of the author. Droplets will be contacting all members of the City Council and personnel in other City Departments for commentaries.

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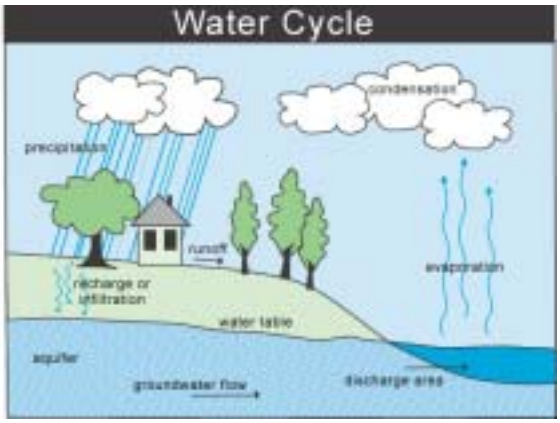
Kids' Corner

1. The process when water becomes a gas in the atmosphere is called _____.
2. The movement of water underground is called _____.
3. _____ is water that falls from clouds as rain or snow.
4. Water on the earth's surface which moves into a stream or lake without absorbing in to the soil is called _____.
5. Groundwater is contained in layers of rock or sediment called an _____.
6. _____ is the downward movement of water through the spaces in rock or soil; when surface water becomes groundwater.
7. The process when gas condenses to form clouds is called _____.
8. The top of the saturated zone is known as the _____.
9. The _____ is the area where groundwater enters a lake or stream.



Quiz courtesy of The Groundwater Foundation, www.groundwater.org

ANSWERS: 1. evaporation 2. groundwater flow 3. precipitation 4. runoff 5. aquifer 6. recharge or infiltration 7. condensation 8. water table 9. discharge area

Droplets is a publication of the City of Atlanta Department of Watershed Management.
For information, or to submit a story, contact Janet Ward, 404-330-6620, or Elizabeth D'agostino, 404-330-6801.