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News Release

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AUB PLANT, WORKFORCE TAKE TOP HONORS AT TWWA QUARTERLY MEETING

ATHENS, Tenn. – At its quarterly meeting last night the Tennessee Water and Wastewater Association (TWWA) named AUB’s Oostanaula Wastewater Treatment Plant the top plant in the state and named AUB’s Randy Harrison as the top collection systems operator in the state.

The plant received the William Hunter Owen Wastewater Treatment Plant Award and Harrison the Jim Pilkin Collection System Award.

AUB spokesman Wayne Scarbrough said that wastewater work sometimes goes unnoticed by the general public because most of the infrastructure is underground.

“Out of sight, out of mind, you know,” Scarbrough said. “But this is huge. To have our newly renovated plant and one of our system operators named top in the state should be a source of pride for the entire community.”

Harrison, a state certified level II collection systems operator, has worked in collection systems for 33 years with the city of Athens and AUB.

Jill Davis heads AUB’s water and wastewater divisions. She said that Harrison’s work ethic and personal commitment to excellence are indisputable.

“Randy takes great pride in looking for the best way to accomplish a job and in doing every job correctly, start to finish,” Davis said. “He is a perfect example of what is good about our industry and how the people who do the work view it as a service to the entire community.”

TWWA state chairman Darryl Green praised Harrison for his accomplishments and ongoing leadership.

“Randy is a leader in the wastewater field. The Jim Pilkin Collection System Award is the highest ranking state wide award given to a collection system operator. His professionalism raises the level of service and reduces the cost of service to the customers served by AUB,” Green said.

“As chairman of the TWWA, I would like to thank Randy and AUB for a job well done. It is my hope that other systems in Tennessee will take Randy and AUB’s lead,” Green added.

As a crew foreman, Harrison leads efforts to remedy inflow and infiltration, called I&I. I&I is a problem at the heart of the notorious and state-mandated sewer moratorium in Athens.

I&I occurs in all gravity wastewater systems over time. It is a monumental issue across the country as the nation’s infrastructure ages, Scarbrough said.

“I&I involves unwanted groundwater and storm water infiltrating the wastewater collection system. High levels of I&I can overload a collection system and treatment plant, resulting in overflows and untreated discharges,” he said.

Harrison oversaw the field work recently when AUB replaced wastewater systems for 210 homes in north Athens by installing a low-pressure system and grinder pumps at each home. In another recent project, Harrison and his crews replaced multiple manholes and enough main line to remove some 400,000 gallons per day of ground water that was infiltrating the collection system.

Combined, the two projects eliminated as much as 1.1 million gallons of excess I & I flow daily into the community’s wastewater system.

“These projects and similar work throughout our system are what will position AUB to request relief from the sewer moratorium,” Davis said. “City leaders will celebrate when this happens, and we should all recognize that it could not happen without people like Randy Harrison, his crews, and everyone at our treatment plant,” she said.

The Oostanaula Wastewater Treatment Plant has undergone a massive upgrade from a 2.8 million gallon per day plant to a six million gallon per day facility that can peak at 12 million gallons per day if needed.

The plant was most recently awarded the Kentucky-Tennessee Water Environment Association’s Operational Excellence Award for 2007. This is awarded to treatment facilities with no more than one violation in a year’s period. The Oostanaula plant had none.

When the expanded Oostanaula plant was placed in operation, more than 95 percent of overflow volume was eliminated in the Athens area. This, coupled with the work Harrison and his crews have done on the collection system across the community, is another step toward ending the sewer moratorium, Davis said.

Among the many items noted by TWWA in considering the AUB plant for the top award was the fact that AUB’s record keeping practices exceed state requirements.

The Oostanaula plant has eleven operators. Seven are Grade IV certified by the state of Tennessee.

AUB has an aggressive apprentice education program that requires continual training and semi-annual written tests administered by AUB, Davis said.

“We expect a lot from our operators because of the importance of treatment to our community, and they consistently deliver what the community needs,” she said. “I’m proud for them that their plant was named the very best in the state.”