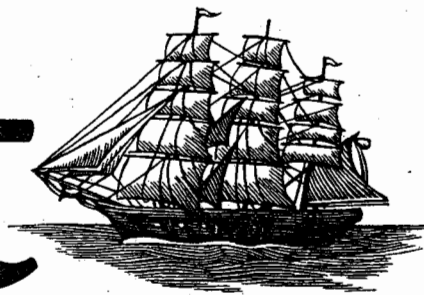

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KKW Water District takes home excellence awards

**By Molly Lovell
Staff Writer**

Kudos are in order for the crew of the Kennebunk, Kennebunkport and Wells Water District.

Staff members took home an armful of awards at the Maine Water Utilities Association (MWUA) Annual Convention held in Portland last week including an Excellence in Operations Award, first place in the Rigs and Gigs contest and the Sid Anthony Award, named after one of the founding fathers of the MWUA.

"I felt quite proud," said Superintendent

Norm Labbe. "Being recognized by our industry peers is a very gratifying thing and it gave me further proof, in my mind, that we have an exceptional group of people here," he said.

The district's 40 employees possess more than 621 years of combined water works experience averaging 15 years per team member.

"We work as a team. These awards confirmed our thoughts that we are a cut above the rest. It was nice to get that validation by our peers," Labbe said.

The Excellence in Operation Award

recognizes a public water system where a team effort has contributed to superiority in a number of areas, including continuous improvements to the system's water quality.

Labbe said the organization is constantly experimenting with different ways of treating water to improve the stability and quality of the water, improving filters and tweaking processes that make them one of the most innovative water districts in the state.

A pumping, treatment and recycling facility was recently completed at the

district's Route 1 location.

The majority of the \$1.2 million project was designed, engineered, constructed and administered in house, saving district customers nearly \$700,000.

Labbe said he hopes this and the other awards help their customers understand the value of their service.

"We don't take it lightly," he said. "We're not just coming in and punching a clock. It's a vocation, not just a job."

A utility worker was driving through

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KKW awards

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a neighborhood recently and noticed water pouring out on to the sidewalk. The customer, an out of state resident, was contacted and the water shut off avoiding major damages to the customer's home.

"We do those types of things routinely... when utility people are hired we make sure they can handle customer issues and really enjoy dealing with the public," Labbe said.

Speaking of outstanding employees, Don Gobiell, recipient of the Sid Anthony Award, has been working with the organization for 28 years and is currently the director of technical services.

Labbe said Gobiell was a perfect candidate for this honor because of his versatility and

dedication to the job. Gobiell is salaried, but generally spends more than 40 hours a week getting things done.

Labbe said he's well versed in everything from local events, economics, construction practices and all of the other ins and outs of what it takes to maintain such a district.

Gobiell also tries to get involved in the community as he is an active board member of the Kennebunk Land Trust and was recently appointed as a member of the Sanford Airport Advisory Committee.

He described Gobiell as a "behind the scenes sort of guy and a very accurate and meticulous person."

The third and final award brought home

by the KKW goes to a person that Labbe calls his, "electro-mechanical Einstein," otherwise known as Rob Weymouth, the organization's facility manager.

Weymouth took home first place in the Rigs and Gigs contest, which is a competition that acknowledges the creation of unique devices, or procedures that provide an original and more efficient way of performing a task or function.

Weymouth created a device that will eliminate condensation and/or excess heat from any facility that has a water supply.

The district has been using this device in several of their booster stations for roughly four to five years, Weymouth said.

Staff had talked about installing air conditioners in the stations to keep the equipment cool, but it would have been too costly and noisy, as many of the stations are in residential neighborhoods.

The device Weymouth developed gets rid of those worries and has proved to be an energy and equipment saver, as it keeps dust and dirt from ruining machines that are worth thousands of dollars.

Weymouth doesn't think much of the award he said, as he's always experimenting with different ways to do things.

"Necessity is the mother of all invention... and if you give a lazy man a hard job, he'll find an easy way to do it," he laughed.