The February 2021 winter storm left very few unscathed and the San Antonio River Authority’s (River Authority) Utilities team was no exception. The five days from February 14 – 19 left many without power and water for extended periods of time during extreme winter conditions. Our essential utilities staff within operations, maintenance, and collection departments are some of our unsung heroes from the storm. Along with other utilities workers throughout the community, these individuals answered the call to help maintain and respond to a variety of situations surrounding critical wastewater collection and treatment infrastructure. The River Authority utilities staff completed numerous emergency repairs and implemented interim solutions to keep the plant operations going without incident. Their efforts helped ensure that our discharge to local creeks during the storm remained of high quality.

The extreme weather in mid-February resulted in many having to carefully navigate the service area to ensure continuity of operations, as well as several being “snowed in” and staying overnight at plant facilities due to unsafe road conditions. In addition to managing our River Authority owned facilities, staff also worked with surrounding communities to help mitigate damage and service interruptions.

The River Authority’s utilities staff displayed perseverance and resiliency throughout the winter storm event. We cannot thank our Utilities staff enough for ensuring services were not disrupted and for the prompt assistance they provided our community partners.
The San Antonio River Authority (River Authority) Utilities Department and engineering staff are working on what is commonly referred to internally as "Project 29." This project received its name from a list of priorities developed through the 2017 Martinez IV Wastewater Treatment Plant (WWTP) Master Plan. On the priority list, this project was number 29. Due to the growth and development in the area, the River Authority has had to accelerate this project along with the expansion of the Martinez IV WWTP.

Project 29 consists of approximately 15,500 linear feet of gravity sewer pipe, which will connect to an existing gravity sewer line between the Graytown and Millican Grove lift stations and spans to the Martinez IV WWTP. This project will enhance our wastewater collections system by consolidating two existing force mains into one gravity line that will allow for easier management. It will ultimately reduce long-term operations and maintenance costs, reduce the likelihood of sanitary sewer overflows, and extend the capacity of the upstream system.

Currently, our team is reviewing the qualification submittals from interested engineering firms. This project could be completed as early as February 2024, or as late as November 2024. Once completed, the proposed sewer line will allow for the decommissioning of the Graytown and Millican Grove lift stations. The project will extend south of IH-10 to Graytown Road, but the exact course is unknown until a route analysis can be conducted, which is anticipated to be complete by Summer 2021.

We will continue to update the community on this and other on-going construction projects in our Utilities Department. For more information or to contact us, please visit sariverauthority.org/utilities.

Project 29: Near IH-10 & Graytown Rd.

Employee Highlight

Ramon Saldivar started with the San Antonio River Authority (River Authority) as a System Technician on the collections team in May 2017. He learned the ropes quickly and was recognized for his hard work with a promotion to Collections Technician II during the summer of 2019. Approximately a year later, Ramon transitioned from the Collections team to the Operations team. This move better aligned with Ramon’s current studies at the University of Texas at San Antonio where he is pursuing a Civil Engineering degree. In a little over 4 months, he was able to obtain his Wastewater Class B Certification. This certification requires a combination of hands-on work experience, approved education courses, and an examination. Ramon’s motto is “I am only as strong as my team,” demonstrates his leadership and commitment to his team as a mentor. His colleagues report that he provides advice, guidance, feedback, and encouragement. He has even been known to take personal time to educate and guide his colleagues. Nearly a year after transitioning to the Operations department, Ramon was promoted to Chief Operator for the River Authority’s Martinez IV wastewater treatment plant (WWTP) and the La Vernia WWTP where the River Authority runs daily operations. This was no small feat. Ramon went from a fledgling operator to being a supervisor and overseeing operations amidst a global health pandemic with skeleton crews and limited resources. His supervisors tout him as an extremely valuable team member and an exceptional leader who has a clear understanding of the River Authority’s duty to the ratepayer and the environment. He is constantly working on projects to improve plant performance beyond that of an average operator. Ramon continues to improve himself not only by traditional education methods but also by seeking constructive criticism. In addition to being the chief operator for two WWTP’s, he is also the backup operator at two other plants. Ramon’s technical, professional, and leadership growth has made him an extremely valuable member of the River Authority team!
What is a Clarifier?

The root word of Clarifier is Clarify. According to Merriam Webster, “clarify” means to make understandable, free of confusion, or to make (a liquid or something liquefied) clear or pure usually by freeing from suspended matter. While you may not need to use a dictionary to define “clarify,” we wanted to draw your attention to the third part of the definition which helps explain what a Clarifier is intended to do in the wastewater treatment process.

The Clarifier is the third step of a six-step process of the wastewater treatment process. The first step, once wastewater enters the treatment facility, is at the headworks where large debris is removed. The second step is called biological treatment where small organisms break down the organic waste in wastewater in what are known as aeration basins. In the third step, also the step in which our publication is named after, a clarifier is a settling tank that uses mechanical assistance to clear up or clarify wastewater by removing sediments and solids. Water within the clarifier is slowed down to allow particles to be settled out by the force of gravity. The sediments that settle at the bottom of the clarifier, also known as sludge, are removed through a pipe at the bottom. There is a metal arm on the top of the clarifier, also known as a scum skimmer, which removes grease, oil, and other floating material from the surface. Clear water overflows the sides of the clarifier and moves on to the next step, ultraviolet disinfection. After disinfection, the water is discharged back into area creeks and rivers. Finally, the sludge that was removed in the clarifier process is pressed to remove excess moisture to make it easier to transport to a landfill or composting facility.

We intend for this newsletter to help make information about wastewater treatment understandable to our sewer and wastewater customers. Now that you know more about the wastewater treatment process, we hope you agree that The Clarifier was an obvious choice for our Utilities newsletter.
On Wednesday, March 17th, the San Antonio River Authority (River Authority) Board of Directors named Derek Boese (pictured) as the agency’s new General Manager following a national search to replace Suzanne B. Scott who retired in October 2020. During the March 17th board meeting, River Authority Board Chairman Darrell Brownlow thanked Lehman Associates of Austin, Texas for helping to conduct the executive search for the River Authority and commended the thorough selection process that took place to find qualified candidates.

Chairman Brownlow went on to say, “I’m confident that Derek will continue to build on the great foundation of engineering project management, scientific services, and environmental stewardship the River Authority has become known for.”

Our new General Manager has an extensive professional background that includes a career in the U.S. Army, where he served in Iraq as an Engineering and Construction Program Manager leading a combat unit based at the 4th Infantry Division, Fort Hood, Texas. Following his successful military career, Derek took a position as an Associate Vice-President at Atkins North America where he was selected by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to serve as the first Chief of Staff for the Hurricane Protection Office, which was created following Hurricane Katrina. His career also includes service as Vice President of Professional Service Industries in Jefferson, LA and as Executive Director of the East Jefferson Levee District in Elmwood, LA. Derek is finishing up his service as the Chief Administrative Officer for the Flood Protection Authority – East, a regional agency based in New Orleans where he oversees a $4 billion regional flood risk management system.

Addressing the board on March 17th, Derek said, “I look forward to meeting the River Authority team and getting to know the elected officials and community leaders of Bexar, Wilson, Karnes, and Goliad counties. My experience in flood risk reduction, ecosystem restoration, and recreation management fits well into the River Authority’s mission being committed to safe, clean, and enjoyable creeks and rivers. I’m ready to get to work!”

Derek’s first day will be May 3rd, so my time as Interim General Manager will soon be coming to an end. It’s been a great pleasure to serve in this capacity but I’m not going anywhere and will resume my duties as the Assistant General Manager. I look forward to helping Derek transition into his role here as General Manager.