

ALABAMA ONSITE WASTEWATER ASSOCIATION

# AOWA news

Better Living Through Improved Sanitation

Vol. 26 No. 2 Spring 2020



[www.aowainfo.org](http://www.aowainfo.org)

INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

Enhancing the Education Program

2020 Tradeshow Photos

Top Tips for Equipment Purchasing in  
a New Taxing Environment

and more.

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The appearance of products in advertising or the editorial content of this newsletter does not imply endorsement by AOWA.

On the cover: The 33rd Annual AOWA Tradeshow proved to be an exceptional value for attendees  
*March 12-13, 2020.*

## From the AOWA President



Happy Spring!

I'm honored to serve another term as your AOWA President. I hope you're all staying safe and well during these uncertain times. Please rest assured the AOWA is here for you as we maneuver through this new normal. Together, we can get through this crisis.

The AOWA recently hosted its 33rd Annual Trade Show at Lake Guntersville State Park Lodge. Nearly 350 industry professionals took part in the two-day event. This year's show offered its participants the opportunity to earn continuing education units, visit a number of exhibitors, participate in the excavator rodeo and first ever swap meet, and attend an industry appreciation gathering. We hope you found these offerings beneficial. I would like to take a moment to thank those who played a role in making this event another great success. Thank you to the Lake Guntersville State Park Lodge staff, the AOWA Board of Directors, the ASG staff, our sponsors, exhibitors, instructors, and most importantly you - the attendees. This event would not be possible without each and every one of you.

If you attended the trade show as a non-member, we hope you were able to see the benefit of membership with the AOWA. And we hope you will consider joining! For those who are members and need to renew your membership, please do so. Don't miss out on our member benefits! A membership form can be found within this issue and on the AOWA website.

The AOWA recently promoted its annual scholarship program for students interested in financial assistance to further their post-secondary education. I'm happy to report we received several outstanding applications that are currently under review. The top five applications will be awarded a scholarship. Stay tuned for the announcement of the winners.

Helping Hands Across Alabama continues its efforts to assist those in need of septic installations and repairs. Anyone who would like to volunteer for an upcoming Helping Hands project, and are **NOT** currently an AOWA member, will receive a complimentary membership for one year. You would be responsible for renewing the membership once the first initial year

Alan Astin  
AOWA President



is up. To volunteer your time and receive this complimentary membership, please contact Abby Ashley at the AOWA office. We look forward to working with you and appreciate your time and commitment to this worthwhile project!

Due to the COVID-19 'stay at home' orders from Governor Ivey we are having to make adjustments on the 2020 Continuing Education and Licensing class dates. Once we are past the 'pandemic' issue we will announce the revised schedule. We will keep to future dates as close to the previously published dates as possible. If you have registered for a class you will not lose your registration fee if you have to move to another date. Please note the Basic Installer classes are currently full; however, you can call the AOWA office to be placed on a wait list. You can also find this information and registration forms on the website.

We are excited to announce updates to the AOWA's education program. The AOWA has enlisted the services of the Home Builders Association of Alabama (HBAA). The HBAA will be coordinating all continuing education classes moving forward. More details on continuing education will be shared at a later date. The AOWA has also been collaborating with In The Works, a consulting firm that will be developing the curriculum for the licensing classes. Within this issue you will find an article containing more information on our new relationship with In The Works.

We know these are trying times and we need to lean on each other now more than ever. Please know the AOWA is here for YOU! Our goal is to provide the best resources and utmost support to our members as industry professionals.

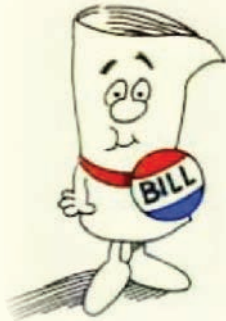
As always, thank you for your efforts in keeping the AOWA a successful, supportive association for its members and others in the Onsite Wastewater Industry.

Take Care, Alan



# Board Member Recognized

During the Annual Meeting, the AOWB recognized AOWA Board Member, **Marc Geiger**, for his founding leadership of the Disaster Relief Assistance Program. His dedication and service to the State of Alabama is to be commended. Thank you Marc for your hard work in aiding these victims in their time of need.



**We want to keep you informed!**

Please visit the AOWA website for updates on legislative bills and activities that affect our industry.

[www.aowainfo.org](http://www.aowainfo.org)



## UPDATE YOUR AOWA MEMBERSHIP CONTACT INFORMATION TODAY!



Please fill out the membership information update form below and mail back in the pre addressed envelope.

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# Oh No, Not Another Staff Meeting!?!

By: Kate Zabriskie, Pumper Magazine, April 2020

You've all heard the groans when announcing everyone needs to gather in the conference room. But well-planned staff meetings will make your business better.

For a myriad of reasons, many managers or small-business owners don't hold regular staff meetings. Furthermore, most who do don't get the most they could from them, and that's too bad. Good staff meetings can focus a team, energize employees and engage them in ways that ad hoc interactions don't.

So how do you turn a halted or ho-hum approach to staff meetings into a high-functioning management tool?

## **Step 1: Connect Daily Work with Your Organization's Purpose**

In addition to distributing information, staff meetings present an opportunity to connect your team's daily work to your company's purpose. If you think your people know how their work fits into the company's overall goal, you would be wrong. In fact, if you ask your employees what your organization's purpose is, don't be surprised when you get as many answers as there are people in the room. (And you thought you had nothing to talk about in a staff meeting! A discussion about purpose is a good one to have.)

Purpose is why you do what you do. You connect the work to the purpose by explaining how what people do aligns with the greater goal. For example, the head of housekeeping at a busy hotel might hold a meeting with the cleaning staff. In that meeting, the managers might recognize a team that received a perfect room score from all guests who took a survey and then talk about purpose. The purpose of the hotel is to provide people a

safe and comfortable place to spend the night. Having a clean, welcoming and functioning room is one of the ways a cleaning staff achieves that goal. By regularly connecting such activities as cleaning toilets, making beds and folding towels to the guest experience, the manager highlights why each of those activities is important.

Hotels or your job of pumping septic tanks or providing portable sanitation services are no different. No matter what they do, employees usually enjoy their jobs more when their leaders talk about the importance of their work. They also tend to make better choices if they receive frequent reminders about purpose and what types of activities support it.

## **Step 2: Highlight Relevant Metrics**

Connecting work to purpose usually works best when a team focuses on both anecdotal and analytical information. If you don't currently track statistics, start. What you track will depend on your industry. However, whatever you decide should have a clear line of sight to the larger goal. For example, a septic service company might track on-time service records, positive or negative customer responses, or a rate of new customers or customer retention related to advertising or marketing efforts. With regular attention placed on the right metrics, the team is far more likely to make good choices as to where it should focus its efforts.

## **Step 3: Follow a Formula and Rotate Responsibility**

Successful staff meetings usually follow a pattern, such as looking at weekly metrics, sharing information from the top, highlighting success, a team-building activity and so forth. By creating and

continued...

sticking with a formula, managers help employees know what to expect. Once employees know the pattern of the meeting, many are capable of running it because they've learned by watching. Managers then have a natural opportunity to rotate the responsibility of the meeting to different people. By delegating, the manager frees up his or her time and provides employees with a chance to develop their skills.

#### **Step 4: Celebrate Successes**

In many organizations, there is a huge appreciation shortage. Staff meetings provide managers and employees with regular intervals to practice gratitude.

"Bob worked overtime cleaning overused restrooms at the special event on Saturday. Because of that, we got rave reviews for our service by the customer."

"Mary Ann's efficient routing of our trucks when we were jammed with work on Friday got everyone home to their families for dinner and saved the company hundreds of dollars."

A steady drip of sincere gratitude can drive engagement. Note the word "sincere." Most people have an amazing capacity to identify a false compliment. Real praise is specific. Well-delivered praise also ties the action to the outcome. People appreciate praise more when they understand how their actions delivered results. A praise segment in your staff meetings ensures you routinely take the time to recognize efforts.

#### **Step 5: Focus on Lessons Learned and Continuous Improvement**

Staff meetings that include an opportunity to share lessons learned help drive continuous improvement. At first, people may be reluctant to share shortcomings. However, if you follow step four, you should begin to develop better communication and a sense of trust with your team. Modeling the process is a good place to start. "I learned something this week that I want to share with you. I had a call with a customer that could have gone better. I'm going to tell you what happened, and then we'll discuss some ideas about how I would handle something similar in the future."

The more you practice this exercise, the greater the gains you should experience.

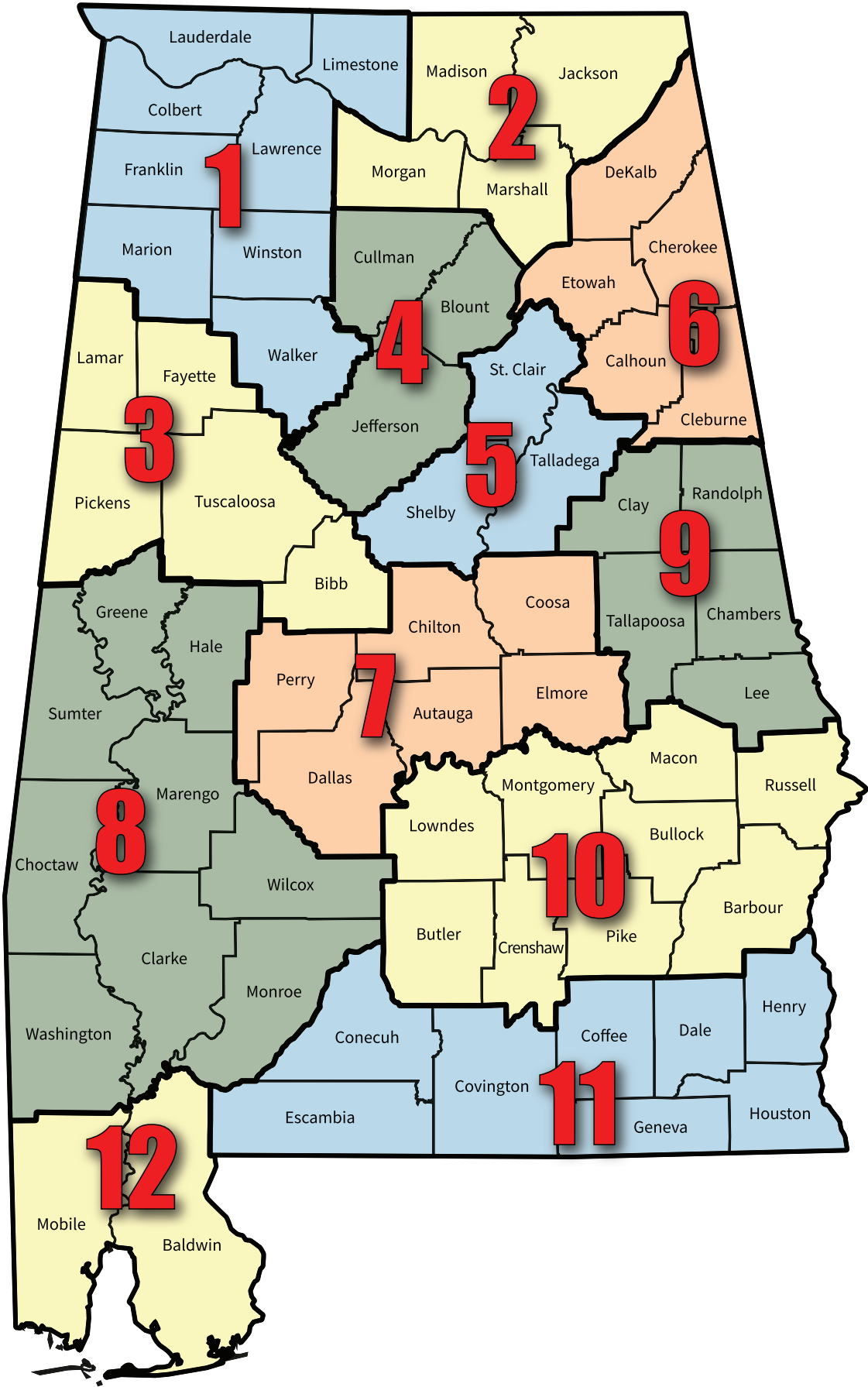
#### **Step 6: Develop a Schedule and Stick with It**

Almost anyone can follow the first five steps some of the time, but those who get the most out of staff meetings hold them consistently. They publish a meeting schedule, and they stick with it. They may shorten a meeting from time to time or reschedule, but they don't treat their chance to gather the team as a low priority.

Good staff meetings aren't perfunctory activities that add little value. On the contrary, when used to their full capacity, they are a dynamic management tool. Now what are you going to do about yours?



# AOWA District Map





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## Enhancing Education

In an effort to revamp the education program for licensees, the AOWA recently conducted a search for a resource that would provide curriculum and technology focused on current regulations and restrictions involved in obtaining/maintaining a license. After careful consideration, the AOWA is pleased to announce its partnership with Julieann Oxley and her consulting firm, In The Works. "I'm excited to see new training courses and more opportunities across the state", said David Mastin, AOWA Education Committee Chair. "Julieann Oxley and In The Works is going to be a huge asset to our industry. Julieann has the knowledge and adult education skills to develop the curriculum that will benefit our industry professionals. This is going to be a great year, and I'm looking forward to this partnership."

In The Works focuses on safety, inspections and education, and will now provide the education curriculum for all licensing classes. In The Works specializes in taking technical information and

making it consumable to the average adult learner. Julieann Oxley has 26 years of experience as a Safety, Health and Environmental Coordinator in manufacturing, construction, and chemical



**Julieann Oxley,**  
In The Works

production facilities. In addition to Julieann's bachelor's degree in Mathematics and graduate studies on Hazardous Materials, she also has OSHA authorizations in Bloodborne Pathogens and is an OSHA 10 and OSHA 30 instructor for Construction. Julieann took a number of OSHA courses at the Kentucky Department of Training and Development and has been a HEICS and NIMS trainer for the Department of Homeland Security. It's safe to say Julieann is well-qualified for the job at hand.

One of the goals in making this transition is to take technical information from the classroom

and transfer it to the field. Moving forward, the education program will feature field and lab exercises, in addition to classroom learning, which will afford students the opportunity to learn outside in a hands-on setting for a portion of the class. "We want there to be more interaction between



continued...

participants; therefore, the course material is being developed to foster those interactions," Julieann said. "Instructors will teach students with the overall goal for them to learn the materials to master the exam; however, there is also an importance of creating an environment of learning and fostering those connections throughout the state. These connections of support will allow professionals to be more successful in their jobs."

With the new education program, the AOWA will be partnering with the Home Builders Association of Alabama (HBAA) and the North Alabama Homebuilding Academy (NAHA) to coordinate and teach the 14 licensing classes and four continuing education courses offered during the year. A part of the new education program is Schoology, an online preparatory tool for in-person licensing classes. Schoology will be managed by NAHA, which was created by the Huntsville Madison County Builders Association (HMCBA) in an effort to provide various basic trade classes to students and individuals working to build their skill training.

How does the new AOWA Education Program work? An individual will register and pay for courses through the AOWA office as they normally would. The HBAA will host classes in Montgomery or Huntsville, giving students two

locations split between the state. Through the new Schoology tool, the individual will have access to materials before the class takes place. Instructor presentations will be distributed to students once the class has been completed. These materials will aid the student in studying for the exam. The caveat to all of this is that the material can be kept current. As material needs to be updated, it can easily be done so across the board through Schoology. All class material will be the same regardless of the location of the class. A student will have the ability to complete necessary forms requested by the instructor in advance, participate in practice tests in preparation for the licensing exam, contact the instructor directly with questions, and have the ability to see other members of the class. Again, this fosters that environment of learning and making connections.

The AOWA is looking forward to this new partnership with Julieann Oxley (In the Works), NAHA and the HBAA. "The AOWA's overall goal is to provide industry professionals with the educational tools to be successful," said AOWA President Alan Astin. "We feel these partnerships can provide those tools."





# Lowndes County Unincorporated Wastewater Project

By: Sherry Bradley & Leigh Willis

The Lowndes County Unincorporated Wastewater Project (LCUWP) began its inception two years ago with the dedication and determination of Ms. Sherry Bradley, Director, Bureau of Environmental Services, Alabama Department of Public Health. Ms. Bradley saw a need within Lowndes County of low funding, and extreme need of onsite systems in the unincorporated lands of the county. In those two years, Ms. Bradley, along with Mrs. Leigh Willis, Director, Community Environmental Protection began "beating the bushes" and meeting with the residents and landowners of the unincorporated communities of Lowndes County. Within the coming months, the LCUWP will become more than an idea put on paper but put into action. As Ms. Bradley and Mrs. Willis canvassed the communities over the past 2 years, it was determined that very few systems will be conventional. **95% of the systems installed within this program will be decentralized or engineered.**

Within the funding of the LCUWP, Alabama Onsite Wastewater Board installers will begin to submit bids. An email was sent to all installers asking to submit an email of interest. A requirement to submit a bid to includes the following:

- Must be a licensed level 2 installer
- Must not have been found guilty or signed a consent agreement in the past 3 years with the AOWB Licensure Board.
- An email sent to Sherry Bradley and/or Leigh Willis with ADPH expressing interest in helping with the project. No further emails will be accepted.

## The following standards must be included in the bid packet:

- Inlet pipe shall have a two way clean out with a sewer popper added
- Tanks shall be filled two inches into the riser and not leak any more than two inches in a 24 hour period. All tanks will have a water tight test onsite. All tanks must come from a licensed manufacturer. If a leakage occurs, an additional water tight test will be performed after repairs to tank are made. Tank manufacturers are responsible for making all corrective measures.
- Risers shall be installed per manufacture's installation instructions.
- Inlets and Outlets of tanks shall have a flexible adapter boot with a required stainless-steel clamp. The boots will be installed into the tank by the tank manufacturer when the tank is constructed.
- Tanks shall be installed with a minimum of 6" of sand around the tank and 6" of natural soil put on top of the sand to ground level. Tank must be a minimum of one foot deep to ensure grass will grow around surface.
- All panels will be installed on the dwelling or Unistrut. If mounted on a Unistrut it shall be located as close to the dwelling as possible. All panels are to be 4-5 feet in height.
- Wood is not allowed to be used at any time. Unistrut is to be used in its place.
- Panels shall be SJE Rhombus or SSI simplex. Equivalent panels are acceptable.
- Wire Junction boxes are not allowed. All wires shall reach a control panel without splices, unless specified by the manufacturer.

continued...

- All float and pump wires will run through a separate conduit to the panel, unless specified by the manufacturer.
- All wires will have a cord grip (gas seal) to ensure gasses do not travel through conduit into the control panel.
- Any conduit or piping that enters the riser will have grommets for noise control, vibration isolation and water tightness.
- All field lines with gravel shall be a SDR35 or greater.
- If awarded the bid, the installer shall give a two-year warranty of craftsmanship for work performed.

All bids may be reviewed by a consulting firms in the Washington, D.C. area. ADPH and the Lowndes County Sewer Board look forward to working with you in the months to come.

Stay Safe!



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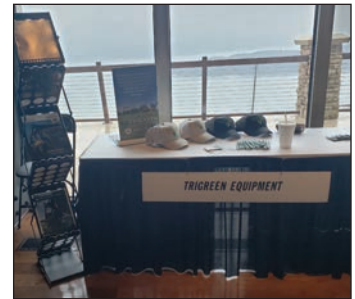
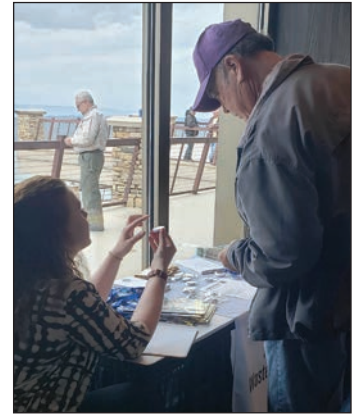
**Geiger's Backhoe & Septic  
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# Tradeshow Photos







Thank you to **Heavy Machines, Inc., a Yanmar Dealer** as the Excavator Rodeo sponsor.



continued...

# Tradeshow Raffle Winners!

**Congratulations** to these lucky winners. We had some great prizes this year, that are sure to be put to good use!

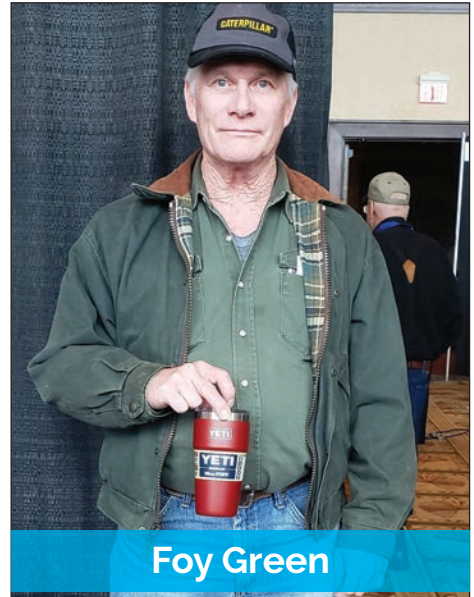
Prizes included:

- 2 yeti coolers
- 3 yeti tumblers
- Turvis tumbler with an overnight stay from Lake Guntersville State Park Lodge
- Craftsman tool set

Thank you to everyone involved in making the 2020 Tradeshow such a success.



**Bryan Bellar**



**Foy Green**



**Jeff Harris**



**Don McCain**



**Paul C. Smith (left)**



**Kent Taylor**



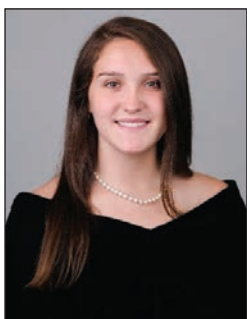
**Gary Wadsworth**

## Congratulations to the AOWA Scholarship Recipients!



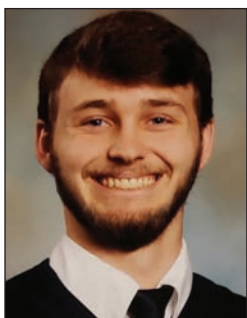
Gabby Walden will be attending the University of Alabama as a freshman this Fall, studying Secondary Education with a concentration in English Language Arts and a minor in History. Her father has been a member of the AOWA for as long as she can remember, and she has countless memories throughout the years helping him work. Gabby would like to thank the AOWA for awarding her with this scholarship, and Roll Tide!

Mallory Allen recently completed her Associate's degree at Jefferson State Community College. She plans to further her education by attending the University of North Alabama in the Fall, pursuing her Bachelors of Science in Nursing. Upon receiving her BSN, Mallory plans to work for Children's of Alabama Hospital. Mallory would like to thank the AOWA for helping her further her education.



Kayla Yarbrough is a graduate of James Clemens High School in Madison, Ala. She currently attends Auburn University, where she will graduate in December 2020 with a degree in Industrial and Systems Engineering. During her college career, Kayla has been involved in Theme Park Engineering, is a member of the Institute of Industrial and Systems Engineers, and has volunteered to build water filters for underprivileged communities. Kayla is the granddaughter of Stanley and Mazzie Twilley, active members of the AOWA.

Baylee Yarbrough is also a graduate of James Clemens High School. She will attend Auburn University majoring in Information Systems Management. Baylee has maintained a 4.0 GPA while completing one year of dual enrollment college classes while still in high school. She was a cheerleader, was involved in theater, and volunteered throughout the community during her high school career. Bailey was a member of the National Honor Society High School Scholars and Sigma Kappa Delta National English Honor Society. She is also the granddaughter of Stanley and Mazzie Twilley.



Michael Ray Walden II (Ray) will be attending The University of Alabama this Fall, majoring in Architectural Engineering. At Alabama, Ray will be on the fast track to completing a portion of his master's degree in conjunction with his bachelor's. Ray recently attended Northeast Alabama Community College, where he also participated in dual enrollment classes throughout his high school career. Ray is a certified welder, is OSHA certified, and is an Eagle Scout. He is a member of Scottsboro First United Methodist Church, where he has participated in mission trips throughout the United States. Upon graduation, Ray hopes to use his education and experience to design and build his own structures. Ray would like to say thank you to the AOWA, and Roll Tide!

# News from the AOWB



## Happy Spring Licensees!

During this pandemic I hope you all are taking precautionary measures to stay safe as you are essential employees protecting the health and welfare of the State of Alabama.

KUDOS to the AOWA for an OUTSTANDING trade show this year at Lake Guntersville State Park. I have heard great reviews from several licensees. I know next year's show will be just as great!

As the AOWB has had an abundance of complaints filed during COVID-19, I am going to reiterate how the disciplinary process works.

How the disciplinary process works: 90% of our complaints come in from local health departments. Once a complaint is received, it is logged in our database. I write a letter or email to the respondent about the complaint and ask them to respond in writing (meanwhile the investigation has begun). The AOWB has a Probable Cause Committee. The committee consists of the Board's attorney, a Board member, the executive director and the investigator. The committee reviews all material relevant to the complaint and determines if any violations have occurred. Once the committee finds probable cause, the

executive director sends a notice of administrative complaint scheduled with a hearing date. What happens on Hearing Day? The AOWB is represented by its attorney, Mr. Beau Cooper. The respondent may represent him/herself, or they may have representation at their own expense. The licensee may want to contact the AOWA if they are members as they may be able to assist licensees regarding such matters. The Administrative Hearing has an Administrative Hearing officer that is retained through the Alabama Personnel Department or the Attorney General's office. There is also a court reporter present. The Administrative complaint is heard by the hearing officer and the nine-member Alabama Onsite Wastewater Board. Once the hearing concludes, the hearing officer awaits the transcripts from the court reporter. Once the transcripts have been received, he/she goes over the case again and writes a ruling or recommendation. The licensee, attorney, and executive director are all mailed a copy of the ruling or recommendation. At the next board meeting, the Board reviews the hearing officer's recommendation. The Board then goes into executive session to discuss each case. The Board then votes on each case. They will accept the hearing

officer's recommendation, make their own recommendation, or add to the hearing officer's recommendation.

I encourage you all to visit our website for forms, disciplinary actions, upcoming events, and the licensee roster. If you discover your name is not on the roster, please contact the office as soon as possible.

As always, if there is anything the AOWB staff can assist you with, please feel free to contact us anytime!

Take Care,



**Melissa Hines**  
*Executive Director*  
Alabama Onsite Wastewater Board

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# Top Tips for Equipment Purchasing in a New Taxing Environment

By: Chris Fowler, Pumper Magazine, April 2020

**The federal Tax Cuts and Jobs Act of 2017 may change how you look at paying for trucks and machines needed to run your pumping company.**

Equipment is one of the most important factors in smooth operation of a pumping business, and the question of how to pay for new equipment is equally important. With uncertainty of how 2017 tax reform will impact equipment acquisition, these business strategies warrant a closer look.

Financing capital equipment can enable pumping businesses to conserve cash and lines of credit while providing maximum flexibility. The need to grow, stay competitive and meet the latest safety standards all factor into decisions when acquiring heavy equipment.

With all of this in mind, now is a good time to determine the best way to pay for capital equipment and maximize the benefits of tax reform legislation for qualifying purchases. This is general information only and is not comprehensive nor is it legal, accounting or tax advice. Consult with your own tax experts for advice on how to handle your individual situation.

## ENTER TAX REFORM

The Tax Cuts and Jobs Act, or TCJA, of 2017 positioned some businesses for growth and profitability.

Manufacturers have historically identified successful go-to strategies to optimize equipment-related tax legislation, but the playing field has changed. From 100% expensing to the elimination of corporate alternative minimum tax, recent changes require a fresh analysis.

Here are four important considerations:

### 1. Equipment financing remains an effective acquisition tool.

The TCJA didn't change the tried-and-true benefits of leasing that have always supported business growth. Equipment financing continues to provide:

- **Enhanced cash flow**, allowing businesses to avoid large out-of-pocket costs and effectively manage cash from operations.
- **Flexibility** and asset-management features, including options to keep equipment in place for the long haul or upgrade to the latest technology.
- **Preservation of credit lines** to support day-to-day business operations rather than long-term capital needs.

### 2. Continued tax savings.

Most equipment offers depreciation benefits. Historically, the most common equipment financing options — loans, nontax leases and tax leases — allowed the equipment owner to deduct equipment depreciation expenses from taxable income, which significantly lowered their tax liability. Fortunately, the TCJA didn't eliminate this benefit.

Evaluating and selecting the option that optimizes your unique business tax strategy is essential. Traditional thinking went something like this: Full corporate tax payers benefited most by retaining equipment tax ownership to take depreciation directly. Loans and nontax leases worked best for these businesses. Businesses that weren't

continued...

full corporate tax payers commonly found more benefit from shifting the equipment's tax ownership to a third-party financing source in return for a lower financing rate. In this scenario, tax leases often were appropriate for the business strategy.

### 3. Historic changes with major impact.

The centerpiece of the TCJA — a reduction in the maximum corporate tax rate from 35% to 21% — dramatically reduced tax liability for many manufacturers. Additionally, the range and size of available corporate tax deductions expanded. The combination of these two changes begs an important question for most businesses: How many deductions can realistically be absorbed going forward?

Determining the tax deductions and credits that benefit your business the most is time well spent. Together, your financial adviser and equipment finance provider can help you determine the right equipment acquisition strategy for your business this year and beyond.

### 4. How much is too much?

Understanding your company's ability to absorb large deductions (e.g., modified accelerated cost recovery system depreciation, 100% expensing and other tax benefits) is important. Here are some areas to consider:

#### *100% Expensing*

For the better part of the last decade, bonus depreciation has reigned supreme, offering an additional 30% to 50% cost recovery — in addition to standard MACRS depreciation — on new equipment in the year it was placed in service. For equipment placed in service after Sept. 27, 2017, and before Jan. 1, 2023, however, the tax reform bill has eliminated the bonus depreciation feature. Instead, those who invest in qualified equipment

during that time can simply expense 100% of the equipment cost in the first year of ownership.

#### *Interest Expense Deduction*

The TCJA now places limits on deductions related to interest accruals and payments made on debt in a given tax year. Unfortunately, this can negatively affect heavy borrowers and those investing in business growth and expansion activities. Equipment leasing might help to offset the pain, however, because rental payments arising from a lease are not included in this calculation.

#### *Alternative Minimum Tax*

The repeal of the corporate AMT was cause for celebration for many organizations. In the past, those paying AMT seemed to automatically benefit from a tax lease equipment acquisition strategy, as capital asset depreciation was an AMT preference item. This meant that equipment depreciation benefits were effectively neutralized and had little value for AMT payers.

#### *Net Operating Loss Carryforward*

Net operating loss carryforward generated in 2018 or later can no longer be carried back (with certain natural disaster exceptions) but can now be carried forward indefinitely. However, NOL will only reduce taxable income by up to 80% a year.

#### *Section 179*

Traditionally, Section 179 allowed businesses with limited capital acquisitions to expense 100% of the cost of new and pre-owned equipment in the first year of ownership. Owners could expense up to \$500,000 in cost, so long as the business' total equipment investment for the year did not exceed \$2 million. For investments totaling more than \$2 million, the deduction declined on a dollar-for-dollar basis.

continued...

The TCJA permanently increased the deduction to \$1 million beginning in 2018, on an equipment investment limit of \$2.5 million. Section 179 has always applied to new and pre-owned equipment purchases — previously a significant distinction from bonus depreciation. However, the new tax reform changes to Section 179 are both permanent and now applicable to a broader set of assets.

### **WEIGHING THE BENEFITS**

Equipment financing can be used as a strategic tool. It allows pumping businesses to not only acquire and employ assets immediately, but also develop a plan to achieve long-term goals.

Whether the objective of your business is to enhance cash flow or optimize tax savings — or both — an in-depth analysis of your equipment acquisition strategy is necessary. Assessing your business' current and future asset needs in the form of a lease versus buy analysis can help determine whether a lease or loan is the best alternative for your company.



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# Septic System Bad Ideas *Ripped From the Headlines*

By: Jim Kneiszel, Pumper Magazine, April 2020

**Fabric softener in the toilet tank? Dangerous DIY septic repairs? Septic-to-sewer conversion facts? It's all in a day's work in the wastewater industry.**

## What about fabric softener as a toilet deodorizer?

When it comes to bathroom plumbing and septic systems, it seems like there is always some sort of wives' tale or sketchy advice floating around for pumpers to knock down. How many of you have heard customers ask if they should put a raw chicken into their septic tank to promote bacterial action?

Now there's another "housecleaning hack" circulating on the internet, and 100,000 people have shared the advice on Facebook ... which means it will eventually reach millions of septic system users. And my guess is you'll be getting asked about this for years to come. The tip spreading like wildfire is to add a cup of liquid laundry detergent or fabric softener to the toilet tank to promote a fresh fragrance in the bathroom every time you flush.

The website [www.truthorfiction.com](http://www.truthorfiction.com) reports on the tip and says there are multiple reasons to question its effectiveness. Among them are whether the liquid cleaners will add a pleasant aroma for more than a flush or two and wondering what impacts the chemicals will have on household plumbing.

The report cites experts who say fabric softeners and detergents may leave a buildup of slimy residue on plumbing pipes. It also says the chemical properties in fabric softeners make it effective at softening adhesives during wallpaper removal, which may create issues for seals and rings in plumbing components.

So, what should you tell your customers who wonder about this helpful "hack?" I asked Jim Anderson, our Septic System Answer Man, for his take. He says putting a cleaning product through every toilet

flush is a bad idea for the health and effectiveness of a septic system. I guess it pays to remember the oldest hack in the pumping industry: Unless it's toilet paper or it comes out of your body, there's no need to flush it down the toilet.

One caveat to that advice is that many pumpers promote and believe in the use of bacterial septic additives as part of a maintenance protocol. ... But when it comes to detergents or fabric softeners, that's an easy "no" for septic system users. Stick with a bathroom exhaust fan and air fresheners to take care of malodors.

## He thought he was being funny, but I found it horrifying.

What do you do when someone makes light of the dangerous practice of climbing into a septic tank and gives absolutely no thought to safety? I think you have to speak up and hope the warning is received and taken seriously. So, this is what happened:

The Rev. Bobby Walsh of the Markstay Pentecostal Church in Sudbury, Ontario, wrote a "humorous" column in the *Sudbury Star* about his experience going into a church septic tank to remove a blockage from the inlet port.

Walsh wrote that as the new pastor, he felt he should be the one to go into the tank to investigate the problem. When he stepped into the tank, "someone chuckled and started to pull the ladder up. I smiled and protested," Walsh wrote. "There were jokes. 'D'ya like the accommodations?' 'Are some of your sermons down there?' 'He's never smelt better!'"

continued...

Walsh found an obstruction in the pipe and worked it free, with sewage flowing freely all over him, "I climbed up the ladder to applause. We finished up. I offered to shake hands. ... With a sense of adventure, we all went home. I had a long shower," he continued. Then he used the story to illustrate how unseen issues can cause problems and we all need to flush them out of our lives.

I realize Walsh, like many others in the general public, didn't know the dangers of entering the septic tank without proper safety equipment and training. But I felt I had to let him know his story could give others the impression they could follow his lead and put themselves in grave danger. So, I wrote him a note and asked him to take action:

"I don't know if you are aware, but people die every week by entering septic and holding tanks, succumbing to hydrogen sulfide gas created in the toxic environment inside a tank. You were blessed and very lucky that you were not sickened or died if you spent any time inside a septic tank."

I went on to explain the Occupational Safety and Health Administration confined-space safety rules, then suggested he contact a member of the Ontario Onsite Wastewater Association and go back to the newspaper to convey an appropriate safety message from a wastewater professional to be printed in a second story.

I haven't heard back from Walsh and fear other septic system users will take his foolhardy DIY approach and go inside the tank to make a repair. I have heard far too many stories about people who died after entering a tank with no knowledge of the dangers.

As members of the pumping community, I feel it's our responsibility to educate when we see or hear about dangerous practices that threaten the

well-being of the general public. You never know when your expertise as a pumper will help avert a tragedy.

### Here's more support for septic.

Savvy homeowners facing potential septic-to-sewer conversions are doing the math. ... And when they look at the costs of such a move, they plead with local government to keep their septic systems. The most recent example comes from West Acton, Massachusetts, west of Boston, where homeowners are finding hooking up to the municipal sewer isn't as good a deal as promised.

Yan Wang looked at the conversion costs for his home and said, "thanks, but no thanks" to abandoning his functioning septic system. In an op-ed piece in *Wicked Local Boxborough* online, Wang says the sewer hookup fee for a single-family home ranges from \$34,000 to \$39,934, and if paid for over 30 years, the cost rises to almost \$60,000. By contrast, Yang notes that he just had his septic tank pumped after 2.5 years and the cost was \$325.

"Most homeowners will not need to replace their septic systems for the next 30 years and spend just \$170 per year to maintain their systems," Wang argues. "There is no indication of septic contamination in the environment. Average fecal coliform is below Acton's average. Nitrate levels are low."

Wang didn't even factor in the monthly sewer fees invariably tacked on by the municipality. Those fees alone typically dwarf the maintenance costs for a septic system. The next time a customer voices concern over your pumping bill, which covers an average of three to five years of septic system usage, share this story of the tremendous value of decentralized wastewater treatment.







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