

## **James McKerr - BIOGRAPHY**



It's hard to decide where my career, in respect to the water and wastewater industry started, but I guess I should look as far back as possible.

When my father passed at a very young age, my family was living out in the country on a hand dug well, septic tank and field, on the edge of a farmer's field that was very prone to flooding. Although I didn't understand at the time, I can remember my mother making it my chore to make sure I added small amounts of chlorine to the well on a regular basis. It was also required that I pump the septic tanks, and once I had to watch and learn as our back yard was dug up to install a new drain field. I lived in this house until the early 1980s and as such knew about the pump, the pressure tank, septic tank maintenance and how to protect against system failure.

Growing up living on a farm made me involved in a very demanding industry. Early mornings, long days and a constant need to be available. I was skilled in operating many different pieces of equipment, and had to teach myself how to repair equipment. I taught myself to weld, or, at least, how to get 2 pieces of steel to stay together. I drove tractors, combines, swathers front end loaders and whatever else we used to get around the farm.

As I reached employable age, I landed a job, with what was then the largest Truck stop ever in Canada. I started early in the construction as a labourer and over the next few years moved on to shift supervisor of the fuel dock, overseeing sometimes 3 or 4 others during a shift, doing this all the while I was going to high school. During the summer I worked days for the local municipality doing many different jobs including: garbage, park maintenance, and looking after the equipment at the local pool. Once again here I found myself checking chlorine, working on pumps and filters and learning that we were doing this to protect the public. I maintained my job at the truck stop as I was heading for collage.

At collage I studied phycology and law believing that one day, I would help people. The truck stop continued to grow and somewhere around 1975, they decided to introduce what was considered to be the most advanced truck washing facility known; a completely brush free system using specially mixed chemicals and very high pressure water. Again I was in the construction team and after my first successful installation, went on to oversee the installation of 5 other washes around North America. This took me away from my collage dreams but I was happy playing in the water.

In 1980 I decided to settle down and as such took a full time, shift job in a union shop with Canada's largest glass container manufacturer, at their new state of the art glass manufacturing facility. With the experience I already had, I was quickly identified as the one that could increase production through developing better procedures and operational methods, at the same time maintain or reducing labour

requirements. Over the next 18 years I worked in many different areas, but the highlights were Quality Control (where I attained certification as a quality technician), shift supervisor (for up to 40 people), and dealing with issues (discipline, strikes, personal and professional relationships). I also was team leader on a number of upgrades and large maintenance projects that were very time delicate. In my last 5 years, I took on the role of facilitator for the implementation of ISO 9000, which is a highly respected method for quality assurance and data management. As certification was nearing I moved on to developing the Continuous Improvement Program, which once again was pretty new to industry in Canada and definitely a challenge in a union environment. After a few months I was able to get enough buy in from other employees, that we were very successful in improving the overall performance of our facility. Although a 3% increase may seem like a small production increase, for a facility that was already operating at 95% it was very rewarding. As this was a state of the art facility, I was exposed from day one to what today we call SCADA; but in those days was more referred to as MMI or to be politically correct, MHI. I was involved with logic development, interface programming and data collection capabilities.

In my personal life, I was involved with many other projects as well. I owned a lawn and garden maintenance company, a swimming pool installation and maintenance company, and I helped with installing state of the art Satellite T.V. (long before the introduction of Shaw, or Telus). During the winters I was a professional ski patroller at one on the local ski resorts.

In about 1997, we packed up everything and moved to British Columbia. Upon arriving it was only a very short time before I found myself working for the biggest pump and plumbing supplier in the area. Here I was involved with many aspects of water pumping, treatment and delivery. I rebuilt and repaired pumps, and built and installed filter systems (mainly for residential use). My main role became stock management and inventory control. Within a very short time I took this medium sized company with big cash flow problems to a new level, insuring product was always on the shelf and turnover met the projected timeframe. I still deal regularly with this company and they believe that the change implemented has led them to success over the last 18 years.

In 1998 I took on the role of Utilities Operator for Mount Washington Alpine Resort on Vancouver Island. They had just installed a state of the art membrane treatment facility for wastewater. No one was able to get it to operate properly. The engineering firm was going bust and the season was fast approaching. With the quality and data skills I had learned, and good communication with the staff that I was given, I was quickly able to develop a baseline to measure plant performance. Quickly we had the plant operating successfully. Through good relationship building and guidance, I was able to get everyone on board on how the plant should operate, and as such maintained compliance operation until I left 7 years later.

Shortly after I started to work for Mount Washington, Walkerton happened and as such it became my role to ensure that the resort was up to par with requirements. In 2001, I started my certification path. (see Attached Documents). During this time I also developed the watershed protection plan, designed, built and operated a bio-solid management facility, developed and implemented a land use application plan, and was involved with the development of a local fire department.

For 7 years as a volunteer, I was heavily involved with a very large (20,000 person) music festival where I oversaw the components of camping, security, environmental issues and parking. Up to, and during this event I had 150 volunteers that I directed through a team of 10 leaders.

Since departing Mount Washington in 2005, I have worked for a number of different municipalities including Whistler, Squamish, Campbell River and some smaller districts including Union Bay and North Cedar on Vancouver Island. I have been successfully operating a small business on Vancouver Island and in the lower mainland, delivering water and wastewater services to private systems owners and local music festivals up to class III, that fall under the drinking water guidelines or the municipal sewage regulation. I have met the criteria to write my level III wastewater treatment certification and also my level II water treatment. I plan to have completed this within the next year.

In 2007, I was involved with an engineering firm in Victoria and oversaw the installation of a wastewater treatment on a cruise ship that was in service. This proved to be a very challenging environment, as this ship was always moving and logistics of getting parts to the ship were always difficult. I was there to oversee and direct the construction crew and ensure that all requirements were being met. Commissioning took place 1 year after I boarded the ship.

In 2015 I began teaching waterworks to entry level students and looking forward I would like to find myself in a position that allows me to further develop my leadership skills and continue to learn more about different aspects of utilities management.

In closing, I would just like to say that I have a very strong passion for the water industry. I take great pride in delivering a service that is, in most cases, not even thought or cared about, until it doesn't come out the tap, or disappear when you flush. When these situations arise it is vital that the decisions I make, will as quickly as possible, restore public confidence. It is these decisions and actions that help me not only problem solve but resolve issues. It is my passion and confidence in the work that I do with the water industry that make me the person for this job.

**1. What are your top two reasons for joining our Board?**

My top 2 reasons for wanting to join the board is to support the young up and comers in achieving a higher level of qualification and to continue to support the many operators I have introduced to the industry and others in continuing to reach their goals

**2. What do you feel are the most important function of the Board?**

To ensure the focus remains on getting operators certified within their field of expertise, knocking down road blocks that may stand in their way.

**3. What will you bring to the Board in experience and accomplishments?**

Many years of working as a team to develop better programs for all, and my knowledge from going through the process to help make the program viable for all.