

Another "Fine" Job Completed In Northern Nevada

By Tonette Hornbarger, customer specialist/Winnemucca

Once each year, the Winnemucca District completes three distinct tasks. It hosts Northern Pipeline (NPL) crews during scheduled PVC replacement projects, the office staff rotates job duties and material orders are suspended during physical inventory. This year, all three of these events took place concurrently.

At first blush, this confluence of events may not seem like anything out of the ordinary, but for a small district with a limited number of employees, it can present some challenges.

For instance, rotating office assignments provides each of us the opportunity to learn everything from general duties, to dispatching, construction and payroll. This training ensures that business flows smoothly even when one of our three office employees is away from work.

The challenging part for me this year was that I was still new to the Construction desk when the replacement project began. At first, I was worried about working with the crews and local/state entities, coordinating schedules, and working in and becoming proficient with WMIS.

But my concerns were quickly put to rest by the exceptional leadership skills of Carson City Construction Supervisor Jim Fine and NPL crew leaders Phil Spragens and Mike Sellars. In just over nine days, the 23-member NPL crews installed 5,752 feet of replacement main, affecting approximately 150 services.

Along with being very skilled at what they do, this traveling team, which typically works on special projects in the spring and fall in Elko and Winnemucca, the summer months in Tahoe, and Fallon and Carson City during the winter, provides an important service to our districts.

Due to our efficient staffing levels, it would be very difficult to pull even one of our folks away from daily duties to oversee large and complex projects for weeks at a time. Having a team of experts that can handle these jobs, allows the districts to focus on their core responsibilities (line locates/leakage/emergency response/etc.) without being overwhelmed by the inspection requirements, documentation processing and special challenges large projects often present.

Construction Manager Byron Elkins said, "Because replacing much of the aging PVC in northern Nevada would be difficult, the key challenges of logistics, proficiency, staffing and cost control had to be addressed. As a result, the traveling pipe replacement team was formed and has since achieved the goals and objectives relative to the challenges they have faced."

Former Winnemucca District Manager Dave Schone said, "Fine's team continues to provide an economy of scale benefit that would be very difficult to equal if the jobs were handled by the districts on a part-time basis. They have developed methodologies that enable them to routinely deal with complex logistical issues associated with large-scale projects such as storm water runoff control, environmental concerns, customer notifications, pavement restoration, agency inspections and permits, and traffic control plans, just to name a few."

The extra thought and effort required for these projects is considerable, but the outer districts truly appreciate every ounce of professionalism and competency with which Fine and his crews complete these projects.



ABOVE: Two NPL crews installed 5,752 feet of replacement main in just over nine days, averaging more than 600 feet each day.