



# IWA PIPELINE



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## NO MORE SALES TAX!



IWA has always been a not-for-profit utility. As such, we have been exempt from certain taxes, including income tax and property tax. However, we have always had to pay sales tax. Then last year we learned, from the Florida Rural Water Association, about a new law in Florida which exempted not-for-profit water companies from paying sales tax. However, the way the State chose to define "not-for-profit" was tied to an IRS classification which did not apply to IWA. Our sister utilities on Pine Island and in Bonita Springs were exempt, so we decided to determine what we had to do to qualify for this exemption as well. We calculated that we would save between \$50,000 and \$100,000 per year, so there was quite an incentive to pursue this matter.

Working with our Representative (District 75) Carole Green, we were able to have the Florida law changed to also apply the tax exemption to our business classification. All IWA members owe Representative Green a big "Thank You!" for her pivotal role in helping IWA to reduce our taxes.

It really feels good to mark through the sales tax line on invoices and pay the pre-tax amount! This is a good example of the ongoing effort by your Board of Directors and all IWA employees to keep your water rates as low as possible.

## IT'S NOT OURS (SOMETIMES)!

Contrary to popular belief, every time you see a water leak on the islands, it doesn't always mean it's IWA's problem. Sometimes (maybe most of the time), it is. But also sometimes, it is not.

For many years, both the City of Sanibel and IWA have gotten calls about a "water" leak that turns out to be the other organization's problem. Either IWA will get called for a sewer leak, or the City will get called for a leak in our potable water distribution system. It's very understandable that the caller might not be able to tell the difference (although sometimes it's obvious if one is downwind and applies the "sniff test"!). Both organizations have gotten quite adept at determining whose system is involved and getting the appropriate repair crews in route as quickly as possible.

Now we have a "new player" in town. The City of Sanibel is continuing construction of its new reclaimed water distribution system. The system is already complete to our new joint injection well on IWA's property, which the City has already utilized on several occasions. They are currently installing connections and meter boxes for future use by individual consumers in the areas to be served by this alternative source of irrigation water. All equipment associated with the reclaimed water system is the familiar pink/purple color of the pipes that have been installed over the last year or so. That includes the meter boxes themselves. We have had a few instances of people calling us about leaks from this new system. In those instances, we first have to determine that it is not our water leaking, and then we have to call the City Utility Department to handle the matter. That obviously delays the response, and increases the resultant wet mess in the area of the leak. So if you see a leak coming from a pink/purple meter box, for the quickest response, please call the City Utility Department at 472-1008. Thanks!

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## THE SPIGOT'S ON AGAIN

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The rainy season must finally be here. On August 9<sup>th</sup>, the South Florida Water Management District rescinded the water-use restrictions it imposed on May 31<sup>st</sup>. Those restrictions limited most outdoor water use to only two days per week (depending on your even/odd house number), between 4 a.m. and 8 a.m. From IWA's standpoint, it was really hard to tell if overall water use declined as a result of the restrictions. There are many other factors which also influence water use, such as the number of people on the islands and the amount of rainfall we are getting. However, one thing was very clear. All outdoor water use was compressed into a very short period of time (only 16 hours per week!), thereby dramatically increasing the flow rates during those periods, and straining our distribution pumping/piping system. This is a common observation/complaint of all water utilities every year when the restrictions are imposed. That, coupled with the natural human instinct to hoard a scarce commodity, makes us wonder whether the overall effect on water consumption is actually a beneficial one, despite media accounts of significant water savings reported by the District. None-the-less, the restrictions are imposed every year, like clockwork.

IWA believes that water is a finite resource that should be conserved by all consumers all year long, not just when official restrictions are imposed. The area where the most savings are possible is, of course, landscape irrigation. Many people irrigate far in excess of the amount necessary for a healthy green lawn. It is not necessary to water every day. In fact, doing so can make your lawn LESS healthy, and MORE susceptible to disease and drought.

There is another aspect of water restrictions that may be unknown to many Sanibel residents. Sanibel Ordinance number 91-41, enacted in 1991, im-

poses permanent water restrictions within the City. Except for "low volume" devices (e.g.: drip irrigation systems), lawn irrigation is prohibited during the hours of 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. This is exactly the type of restriction that makes more sense to us at IWA. It prohibits irrigation during the hot time of day, when evaporation results in less efficient irrigation. It also allows irrigation for a reasonable number of hours per day, instead of cramming it all into just 16 hours a week. Compliance with this Ordinance would mean that water demand would be reduced, along with the strain on our distribution system. We encourage all of our members to ensure that their irrigation schedules are in compliance with this Ordinance. This includes our Captiva members, who are not actually required to do so.

IWA also strongly supports the new reclaimed water system being installed by the City of Sanibel. When this system is fully in service, the irrigation demand on our system will be reduced. That is both good and bad news. The bad news is that our revenues will decrease, but that will be offset to some unknown extent by other cost saving measures, such as the new sales tax exemption described above. On the other hand, use of reclaimed water will lessen the demand on our underground water aquifers, and it will also delay the day when we will need to construct a costly expansion to our treatment plant, both of which are really good news.

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## REZONING AND CONSERVATION EASEMENT

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At the August 8<sup>th</sup> meeting of the Sanibel Planning Commission, IWA submitted an application for rezoning a portion of our property located at 3651 Sanibel-Captiva Road, where our RO treatment plant is located. The background behind this application is an interesting story, involving several interconnected matters that have evolved and come together over the last few years.

Two or three years ago, the City of Sanibel approached IWA to provide access for City contractors removing exotic plants along the Sanibel River. We permitted them to access the area through our site, and they removed the exotic plants from the rear 30+/- wetland acres of our property at the same time. We had been paying another contractor around \$3,000 every year to keep the exotic plants off this land. At this point, City and IWA staff discussed the possibility of IWA granting a conservation easement to the City on this portion of our property, in return for their tak-

ing-over responsibility for controlling exotic plants on the parcel in the future. The easement idea lingered on the back burner for several years.

Meanwhile, the City encountered a reclaimed water disposal problem, and IWA anticipated a possible disposal problem for our brine stream at some point in the future. IWA therefore proposed a joint injection well project located on our property, with the City paying 29% of all costs, and IWA paying the remaining 71%. Although the completed injection well required very little land area, it did require clearing approximately 1.3 acres of additional land for construction purposes. Nearly all of the vegetation involved in this clearing effort was relocated and replanted at various locations around the islands. When construction was complete, we knew that we either had to re-vegetate the area, obtain a variance to leave the area in grass, or seek some sort of rezoning on our property. Re-vegetation made no sense economically or environmentally, since the vegetation would only have to be removed again when maintenance was required on the injection well. IWA and City staff, working together, determined that rezoning was the preferred course of action.

At that point, we went "full circle", back to the idea of a conservation easement on the rear portion of our property. We developed the idea of IWA granting an easement on 31.32 acres of wetlands and rezoning the remaining 18.34 acres (less than 20% wetlands) as a Special Use District, with development restrictions which would permit us to retain the injection well site, as well as allow for reasonable future development for water production purposes. That seems to us to be a win-win solution for all involved parties. An additional 31 acres would be placed into the conservation land "bank" on the island, forever protected from development. IWA, which is owned by all island property owners, would have the necessary area to expand its facilities when/if required at some point in the future, thereby assuring a continued adequate and cost-effective supply of potable water for all island residents. This concept has been endorsed by the Sanibel-Captiva Conservation Foundation.

This matter is scheduled for a second hearing before the Planning Commission in October, to be followed by City Council review soon thereafter.

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## CHLORINE SAFETY IMPROVEMENTS

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In a previous issue of this newsletter, we included an article about our Risk Management Plan. That Plan details the risks associated with our storage of Chlorine at our treatment plant. We made

the point that while nothing is risk-free, we had never had a problem with our Chlorine facilities and anticipated none in the future. We also noted that we planned to make further safety improvements to reduce the already extremely low risk to essentially zero risk. Those improvements are now well along toward completion.

First, we are totaling enclosing our entire Chlorine system and installing a scrubber. The scrubber, which we estimate will cost around \$250,000, will totally absorb any Chlorine release. The scrubber system will operate automatically, based on a signal from instruments which can detect very small amounts of Chlorine within our facilities.

In addition to the scrubber, we are also installing automatic shut-off valves on all our Chlorine storage cylinders. These valves, which cost around \$45,000, will shut automatically, based on a signal from the Chlorine detection instruments. They will eliminate over 90% of the most likely sources of releases. The above described scrubber will take care of the rest.

We expect to complete both of these projects in the next few months.

IWA is taking these steps to improve the safety of our operations, even though they are not required by any governmental regulations. We take safety very seriously!

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## HERE'S LIZZIE!

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In our last newsletter, we didn't include an update on our office mascot, Lizzie. That fact did not go unnoticed by some of our "feline-loving" readership. They called and wrote us notes with their bill payments asking, "Where's Lizzie?" Therefore, back by popular demand, "Here's Lizzie!"

She has now had her annual inoculations, courtesy of her employee friends. She definitely has not lost any weight, but the vet assures us that she is not overweight. We aren't so sure we agree with that assessment, but she sure seems very happy, in any case.



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## WELCOME NIC WEBER

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Nic Weber recently joined IWA as our Facilities Maintenance Technician. In this position, Nic is responsible for taking care of landscaping at our numerous properties around the islands, as well as making sure our offices and other buildings are neat and clean. In the short time he has been with us, he already has the place looking great!

Nic and his wife, Tammy, and their two children, Kayla and Kyal, live on Sanibel, where Nic says he enjoys sports, biking, woodworking and various family-related activities. Nic, who previously worked in the restaurant industry, says the things he most enjoys about his work at IWA are the work diversity, his friendly co-workers and the congenial work atmosphere.

If the volume of shrub/tree cuttings in our dumpster are any indication, we are sure Nic will have a

long and happy career with IWA. Welcome aboard, Nic!

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## SHUT IT OFF (PLEASE)!!

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It's that time of year again ... for hurricanes that is. As of the time this newsletter was being written, Mother Nature appeared to be showing the hurricane forecasters who is really in charge of things. Contrary to all the forecasts, things have been amazingly (and thankfully) very quiet so far. But it only takes one!

As we have done for the last several years, we'd once again like to remind everyone to please shut off your irrigation system if you evacuate your home for a storm. In the past, we have had to deal with unnecessarily high demand for irrigation water during an already very difficult situation as a storm approaches. In addition, in the event of major storm damage and flooding, leaks in irrigation systems could cause unnecessary contamination and water loss, making things even worse for all of us.

We'll have enough problems if the "big one" ever hits us, so please shut off your irrigation system when you leave. Thanks!!

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