

Workforce Strategies

MANAGING TODAY'S STAFFING CRISIS

Be Pro Be Proud as a Water Professional

BY WILL ENGLAND

Historically, the prevailing belief has been that “you must go to college to get a good job.” Although this was true for previous generations, access to college has become more attainable today, leading to less interest and a deficit in the skilled trades workforce. Our society requires a balance between college education and skilled trades.

To address the need for greater exposure to trades at younger ages, the Be Pro Be Proud initiative was launched in 2016 as a partnership between the Arkansas State Chamber of Commerce and the Associated Industries of Arkansas. The program aimed to “bring a new generation of pride, progress, and professionals to the skilled workforce” by using a mobile workshop to introduce students to jobs requiring specialized skills that they may not have considered as a future career.

Since 2016, the program has grown to include Georgia, South Carolina, North Carolina, Tennessee, and New Mexico. Georgia was the first state to sign on to implement the program in 2020 with the support of the Cherokee County Board of Commissioners and the Cherokee Office of Economic Development. To date, Be Pro Be Proud Georgia (BPBP-GA) has visited 111 cities, engaged 58,724 students, and added a second mobile workshop with a tour beginning in fall 2024.

STUDENT ENGAGEMENT

I discovered the program when my employer, Cherokee County Water and Sewerage Authority (CCWSA), allowed me to volunteer with the Cherokee Office of Economic Development (COED). COED works to attract businesses to our county through targeted programs, including BPBP-GA. When witnessing the mobile workshop, I was in awe of the various stations available for students to learn about different professions. The unit has stations that represent careers in welding,

commercial truck driving, healthcare, construction, and more. Inspired, I set a goal to get the water industry represented with the Be Pro Be Proud initiative.

Transforming this vision into reality required significant effort. Fortunately, many passionate water professionals stepped forward to help. Lamar Hunt and Kevin Kieth of Cobb County Marietta Water Authority took on the critical task of constructing the small-scale wastewater treatment plant process units and assembling the display. Inspired by a June 2024 Opflow column, “Using 3D Printing for Teaching and Outreach,” we reached out to the author, Daniel Parish with the City of Denton, Texas, and he committed to print a detailed plate settler. To further

engage students, Chris Clark with Carollo Engineers coordinated the development of an interactive control panel with a touchscreen and switches. Many other water professionals also contributed their time, expertise, and resources to make the project a reality.

This fall, the small-scale wastewater treatment facility will join the BPBP-GA mobile workshop tour. To allow readers a glimpse into the experience of interacting with the module, imagine being a high schooler and walking up to the station. A TV welcomes you and begins to explain the wastewater facility. You learn why wastewater is treated and are asked for help to operate the plant. A touchscreen display and switches are in front of you; you start by turning on the influent pump. You hear water flowing and see the tank filling. Water flows through the prescreening process, where debris is caught in a bar screen. You follow the water into the next tank, biological treatment. Here you learn about



Will England is an environmental affairs lab analyst with Cherokee County Water and Sewerage Authority (www.ccwsa.com), Canton, Ga.

a sequencing batch reactor and turn on the mixer and aerator using the switches.


The pump continues to fill the display and moves to the chemical addition coagulation tank. As water enters the tank, you learn about suspended and colloidal solids and how they are removed through coagulation, flocculation, and sedimentation. To help facilitate the process, you turn on the mixer. The next step is the 3D printed plate settler. You notice the water coming up through the plate settler, over the V-notched weir, and into the trough. While watching, you also learn why plate settlers are used and how they work.

Water then flows to the next process, down through the mixed-media sand filter before entering the final ultraviolet (UV) disinfection chamber. In the UV chamber,

you disinfect the water by turning on the light using the switch. As you interact with each stage, you learn about the importance and functionality of each process. Finally, you learn about careers in the water industry and are encouraged to contact your local utility to schedule a visit.

ONGOING EFFORTS

The success of this initiative now depends on water professionals to promote and expose these bright young minds to the water industry. Nationwide, there is a shortage of youth interested in joining the water profession. Increased exposure and information about our critical role can help develop a more sustainable workforce. It's hoped that this demonstration will engage students and inspire other water professionals to

participate further in Georgia and beyond. To learn more about BPBP-GA, visit www.beprobeproudga.org. 

Acknowledgment: *Thank you to the water professionals who contributed to the BPBP-GA mobile workshop: Michelle Hektor, AWWA Water Equation; Logan Shaw, Avista Technologies; Cole Blackwell, Kevin Kieth, and Lamar Hunt, Cobb County Marietta Water Authority; Angie Marcus and Kristina Ha, Cobb County Water System; Dwayne Fowler, Cherokee County Water and Sewerage Authority; Chris Clark and Sean Murray, Carollo Engineers; Daniel Parish, City of Denton, Texas; Chris Clay, Georgia Water and Wastewater Institute; Andrew Synhorst, Principle Environmental; and Jordan Longoria, Templeton & Associates.*