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GWC, WKU participate in federal partnership program

BY MELINDA J. OVERSTREET moverstreet@glasgowdailytimes.com 15 hrs ago



GLASGOW – A partnership between Glasgow Water Co. and Western Kentucky University is the first in Kentucky to be part of a program implemented by U.S. Environmental Protection Agency Region 4 to help communities connect with certain kinds of resources.

Through this partnership and the College and Underserved Community Partnership Program, abbreviated as CUPP, WKU students will have an opportunity to design three projects – and actually construct one of them – to be used by GWC.

The water and wastewater utility's general manager, Scott Young, said discussions had gone back and forth for a few months before the projects were finalized, and they are underway now.

“We have coordinated with EPA Region 4, who has put us in touch with Western Kentucky University's engineering department, through their CUPP program initiative to do some basic engineering design projects for us. And these are projects that we've had on the radar for a long time to do, but the importance level for us is, we don't want to pull staff off of other projects to design them when we have other bigger projects of more urgency,” Young said.

The first project is a hydration station, he said.

“Basically, this is a mobile station in whatever form they design. It'll be some type of trailer that can be pulled to local civic events and basically you'll be able to get fresh GWC tap water at events like Shindig on the Square or the arts and crafts fair or community sporting events or different types of applications where we can expose people within the community to all the good

things that our utility's doing, have some information about our water and our water source and also allow them to taste our water," Young said. "Not only are they designing it, they're building it. Those students are physically going to construct it within their class."

The second project is a bulk water filling station "where commercial applications or farming applications can drive up to a remote station and insert some type of card reader or money into a device, and it will fill their tanks, their mobile tanks. So if they have a truck or are pulling a tank on the back of a farm wagon or something where they need bulk water sales [they can fill them]," he said.

This and the third one are design-only projects. The location for the bulk water station is still to be determined.

"We need new signage at our water treatment plant and our wastewater treatment plant out front to designate those facilities and what they are," Young said of the third project. "They are going to design the structural elements of a masonry sign to be placed at our treatment plant facilities."

The water treatment plant, for example, has a sign closer to the building as a driver nears the end of a lengthy driveway, but not one at the road entrance. The signs will incorporate GWC logo designs and color schemes, but the students will design the physical structure on which the words and images will go.

"One of the biggest reasons I want to do this is, through this program, it's going to allow us great access and hands-on with WKU engineering students," Young said. "And, although our proposed projects are essentially basic in nature, through this process, it will allow us to have a great opportunity to introduce these engineering students to our water and wastewater industry and hopefully through that process, we'll be able to build program relationships that could be expanded upon and could potentially foster and develop things like future workforce opportunities for us."

Young said he will help guide students on the hydration station and other managers will oversee the others.

“Billy Carver, our operations manager, is going to take the bulk water filling station, and Clint Harbison, our engineering manager, is going to take the structural sign design, and we will be hands-on with these students through this process to allow them some exposure with the Glasgow Water Co. and how we operate,” Young said.

Twenty students total will be involved, and the plan is for all the projects to be completed by the end of the current semester.

The junior design class for the mechanical engineering program is one taught by Morteza Nurcheshmeh, an assistant professor of mechanical engineering starting his sixth year at WKU.

He said Thursday that he had received departmental emails asking whether anyone was interested in working with CUPP, and he looked at the list of projects and felt it would match well with because they were very close to the course objectives.

“I thought this was good, because it services the community at the same time,” Nurcheshmeh said, adding that he believes that fact helps motivate the students more. “This is the first experience I have with [GWC and the EPA], and so far it has been very good, and I see a good cooperation between us and the company in Glasgow and the U.S. EPA office in Atlanta.”

The Daily Times also contacted Michael W. Burns, the national program manager for CUPP and senior advisor to the EPA Region 4 administrator, who responded that he had to go through the agency's public affairs office before he could speak with the newspaper, and he had copied that office on the email he sent. No further contact was received Thursday before the normal close of the business day in Atlanta.

“[CUPP] was created to provide a creative approach to partnering and delivering technical assistance to underserved communities from local colleges and universities. CUPP enlists colleges and universities, with appropriate programs, to assist these underserved communities, with vital technical support, through student internships and capstone projects,” the CUPP page on the EPA website states. “Students work on a range of plans and projects that help communities gain access to resources that can improve the economic future and overall quality

of life for the community. At the same time, CUPP provides practical experience for participating students in their areas of academic study, and students generally receive academic credit for their efforts.”

CUPP began in the fall of 2013 with four schools, and that has increased to 71 schools aligned with 64 different communities. Five more EPA regions of the 10 total have been in various stages of getting involved with the program, and the program expects to have pilot projects in all 10 regions as well as a signed agreement with the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, according to the CUPP page on the EPA website.

“As of June 2018, we have provided over \$15,560,000 of support to communities,” the webpage states.

TO LEARN MORE

Visit <https://www.epa.gov/environmentaljustice/collegeunderserved-community-partnership-program> for more information about the College and Underserved Community Partnership Program.

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