

Case Study:

Jackson, Mississippi



Jackson Woman Faces Reoccurring Sewer Line Problem

Theresa Alexander had a problem that was not going away: sewage was spilling from an open pipe into her yard.

Theresa had lived in her tight-knit Jackson, Mississippi, neighborhood for nearly two decades, where she enjoyed good relationships with her neighbors, including the church next door. Two years ago, she noticed water pooling in her yard and learned that she had a sewer line break. A plumber told her that not only was there a line break, but there was additional damage where the line entered into the main sewer line.

THE HOMEOWNER'S RESPONSIBILITY

Theresa was surprised to learn she was responsible for a tap that was beyond her property line. She had known she was responsible for her service lines up to the meter, but didn't realize cost for the tap – and any cost associated with the repair – fell on her as well. Her homeowner's insurance didn't cover it, she said.

The repair of the line break alone exceeded \$1,000, so Theresa asked how much a new tap into the sewer main would cost. "They said '17,' and I thought they meant \$17," she said. "They said, no, it was \$1,700."

Theresa had to get a loan to fix the line leak, but simply couldn't afford to repair the tap as well. She just hoped it wouldn't be a problem any time soon. "The plumber told me, 'You won't have to worry about this again for your entire life,'" she said. "'Your grandchildren or their children might, but you won't.'"

THE PROBLEM RETURNS

After two years, it seemed that Theresa's problems were in the past. Then sewage began leaking into her yard again, only on a worse scale than before. In addition, it also was leaking near the road, where many of the congregants of the church next door parked.

"They'd get out of their cars and step in it, then they'd go into the church, where they had carpets," Theresa said. "That's not good." Theresa called the city and the public works department confirmed it: the sewer line had broken again.

A POTENTIAL SOLUTION

She had already taken out one loan, but instead of addressing the problem, it had become an expensive deferment. Theresa discovered the city was involved with a grant program that addressed situations such as hers, so she applied to have her sewer line replaced. She qualified for the program and her application was accepted, so she once again thought that her problems were over.





The city sent Jackson-based Dent Air Conditioning Co., which also provides plumbing and electrical services, to Theresa's home, where they confirmed that the line was broken and the tap itself had to be replaced. "There were places on the [recently installed] PVC line that had bellied, and it wasn't graded correctly," Jason Adams, Dent master plumber, said.

When a pipe develops bellying, the soil around it has shifted, allowing it to "sag" and cause dips where flow can become impeded. In addition, most sewer lines need a helping hand from gravity and therefore are graded, or sloped downward, from a home to a municipality's sewer main. These defects, in addition to the breaks, were a real problem for Theresa, causing severe backups into her yard.

Then the grant program ran out of funding – before Theresa's sewer service line was fixed. She was right back to square one. "I was flustered and frustrated," she said.

THE SERVICE LINE WARRANTY PROGRAM INTERVENES

However, Dent is a National League of Cities (NLC) Service Line Warranty Program network contractor, and they saw another way out for Theresa. The NLC Service Line Warranty Program, administered by Utility Service Partners (USP), a HomeServe company, partners with municipalities and service providers to provide education to homeowners about their service line responsibilities and provide warranties to cover water and sewer service lines and interior plumbing.

As a network contractor, Dent must have an A rating with the Better Business Bureau, a high post-service customer satisfaction score, and proper licenses and insurance, and all employees must pass a drug and background check. Dent has provided home services in the Jackson area for more than 60 years, and three generations have worked at the family-owned company.

Dent employees knew that the NLC Service Line Warranty Program also has a charitable program that provides pro bono repairs for qualifying homeowners. Jason thought Theresa would be a good fit, so he personally contacted the NLC Service Line Warranty Program to propose her as a candidate, and the company agreed to take care of the costs associated with her sewer line replacement. Theresa was grateful that, at long last, her sewer line problems are over. "They called and I was so excited," she said. "Thank you, NLC Service Line Warranty Program!"

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Why Offer the NLC Service Line Warranty Program?

KEY BENEFITS

- Experience from a leading company that has more than 3.7 million customers with 5.9 million service plans through over 600 partner utilities/municipalities
- Commitment to educating homeowners and reducing call volume to the municipality
- Superior, reliable and guaranteed service 24/7/365
- Award-winning in-house call centers in Chattanooga, Tennessee, and Canonsburg, Pennsylvania, with over 500 seats
- Incomparable local contractor management results consistently achieving 98% post-service satisfaction
- Programs are proven to increase resident satisfaction
- No cost to cities to participate
- Provides cities with an ongoing revenue stream

To learn more about how you can partner with USP to bring peace of mind to your residents, visit www.utilitysp.net.