Utility Service Partners, Inc.

A Quarterly Newsletter for
NLC Service Line Warranty Program Participants

NEWS & NOTES

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Welcome the Earthworms

Bugs get a bad reputation in our society! With hundreds of bug killers on the market today it's a wonder good bugs have survived – such as earthworms.

For municipalities, earthworms could be the golden key for waste management through vermicomposting – or the use of earthworms to mix decomposing waste safely and naturally.

Earthworms are known to eat any type of organic material, such as manure, sewage sludge, agricultural waste, grass clippings, food waste and wood chips. With these types of garbage in abundance within any city, this new technology is worth a look.

Vermicomposting is nothing new to the gardening community, but only recently has the concept caught on in the municipal world. Through vermicomposting, cities are able to recycle the solid green waste in landfills into reusable content to benefit the entire community.

How does it work? Well, it's simple. This natural and organic process will improve the physical structure of the soil by adding enzymes rich with micro-organisms. When added to the soil, earthworms will be attracted to the decomposing waste which will increase the water capacity of the soil and in turn, encourage plant growth and improved root growth.

Economically, by recycling waste into a useable soil, municipalities are able to reduce the waste flow in local landfills, which will free up valuable real estate – a common problem in many communities. Additionally, the project will create low-skill jobs at the local level with a minimal capital investment making the process simple for even less-developed agricultural regions.

The vermicomposting business is booming in the United Kingdom waste industry as they continue developing due to the need to restrict the biodegradable wastes in favor of sustainable waste management practices. Composting is a vital element in their Government's waste strategy and could be for your own community. For more information, check the resource links on page 4.

NATIONAL LEAGUE of CITIES

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What would your walls say if they could speak?

We all learn from experiences, whether our own or others. This is especially true in local government. In fact much of the learning necessary to function well in an always challenging and very public environment is transmitted by colleagues telling stories to each other. This is particularly true when the stories involve women in government as their numbers and influence have increased so dramatically in recent years. Virtually every break at an International City/ County Management Association (ICMA), NLC or State League conference is filled with individuals sharing their anecdotes and knowledge with each other. *Continued on page 4.*

City of Phoenix Communications Best Practices Get the Word Out

Anytime – anywhere could be considered the motto for Phoenix, Arizona when communicating with residents.

City of Phoenix

Phoenix is one of many cities across the country that has taken to using every means necessary to communicate new programs, services and announcements to residents – from traditional media like print and television to social media like Facebook, Twitter and YouTube.

"We try to use the whole toolbox," said Jon Brodsky, Management Assistant for the Public Information Office & Marketing Partnership Program for the City of Phoenix. "Our overall strategy is to use as many resources as possible to get the word out to the community."

When Phoenix partnered with the NLC Service Line Warranty Program in the fall of 2012, the city used a variety of strategies to spread the word. Beginning with a media advisory and news release, the city also held a news conference at the launch of the campaign and recorded the segment to air on their government cable station, PHX11. Officials also included a story in the newsletter sent to residents each month with their city bills. Links were posted to their website, phoenix.gov and spread via social media, which in just over a year has accrued more than 3,000 likes and more than 36,000 views on their YouTube Channel.

With the spring campaign quickly approaching, Brodsky is optimistic this campaign will be even more successful with a little more pre-planning and taking a look at their lessons learned from the prior mailing.

"This time we're going to get the story into the printed newsletter before we launch the program," said Brodsky. "That way, residents will receive the letter from the city reminding them of the program before they receive the letters from USP."

For Phoenix though, their announcements aren't just static copy announcing the program. Brodsky is committed to reviewing the USP partner portal to share statistics, customer survey results and general feedback of the program and the value with the city's residents and stakeholders.

"When we launch the program in the spring, we will stress how many people have enrolled and have received services through the program," said Brodsky. "We want to focus on the help people have received from this partnership."

If your city would like to know more about how to better communicate to residents, Jon Brodsky is happy to help. Please contact him at jon.brodsky@phoenix.gov.

Contractor Spotlight

ATLANTA PLUS PLUMBING

The plumbing business can be dirty work, but Linda Benninger, President of Atlanta Plumbing Plus, isn't afraid to get her hands dirty in her quest to make a difference. After retiring from a job in telecommunications, Benninger pursued her dream of owning a business where she could make a difference – Atlanta Plumbing Plus was the answer.

"Everyone needs a plumber for leaks and repairs," said Benninger. "The plumbing industry overall has a bad reputation for poor customer service. Since customer service is my passion, I felt that I could run a company that really stood out from the crowd due to excellent customer service."

Staying true to her passion, Benninger has made customer service a number one priority for every employee in her company. From the uniforms and explanations of problems in plain English, to the way they treat their work area – every step ensures homeowners are comfortable having a plumber in their home. Benninger says her customer focus is women-driven because frequently, it's the women of the household who call the plumber.

"I understand how women feel about their homes and how they want their homes to be treated," said Benninger. "We do customer service training every Monday morning so that we start the week with a fresh dose of 'customer first.'"

As a company driven by customer-focus, USP is proud to partner with Atlanta Plumbing Plus to deliver quality service in one of our top cities.

"USP is very responsive to its customers and takes good care of them," said Benninger. "That means we are working with customers who are happy with their service and happy to see us. We start the job off on the right foot."

Gig City, U.S.A.:
Bringing Google Fiber to Kansas City

In 2012, the National League of Cities (NLC) ran a three part series on "Emerging Innovations from the Front Lines of Urban Development" exploring how cities developed innovative models for tackling complex urban issues and strengthening their local economies.

In part two of the series, Nancy Scola followed the story of Google's groundbreaking experiment in bringing ultra-high-speed Internet to homes at affordable prices in the Kansas and Missouri area.

Faster speeds meant new opportunities for people in the area which offered better educational activities (such as interactive classrooms beamed through international school districts), health care applications (checking vital signs of patients remotely), explorations in arts and culture, collaborative research projects, wired homes with smart energy meters and improved municipal services (such as firefighters equipped with tablets displaying 3D renderings of burning buildings) and more.

Kansas City, Kansas and Kansas City, Missouri were part of more than 1,000 communities hoping to harness Google's gig opportunity to bring jobs and innovation to their city. "The way we take advantage of this," said Mike Burke, co-chair of the Mayors' Bistate Innovation Team, "is not to just be Google's beta tester, but the beta tester of everyone who's got an app or device."

For the test to succeed, Kansas City residents would need to embrace the possibility of being at the leading edge of the Internet and a partner with Google. In their search for the perfect location, Google challenged U.S. cities to compete to be the site of the company's first attempt at fiber-to-the-home in February of 2010.

Google was looking to pull off a small-scale, city-based project that would connect somewhere between 50,000 and half a million people. More than 1,000 cities applied

in March of 2011 and after site visits, data-crunching and closed-door discussions, Google announced Kansas City, Kansas and Kansas City, Missouri as the pilot sites.

Shortly after the announcement, Mayor Joe Reardon of Kansas City, Kansas and Mayor Sly James of Kansas City, Missouri appointed the Mayors' Bistate Innovation Team (MBIT) of local leaders and charged it with creating a plan for how the cities could make the most of the opportunity. For months, MBIT met with business leaders, community groups, educational representatives and health care representatives to determine opportunities.

While there were many lessons learned through the process, one of the biggest take-aways from the communities was that Google Fiber wasn't simply about hardware or software, but about a shared reimagining of what it means to be a city of nearly limitless broadband.

The team's resulting report, called "Playing to Win in America's Digital Crossroads" concluded that "a successful Internet economy is 90 percent sociology and 10 percent technology." Ultimately, the leadership team argued "we need people to behave like the Internet – navigating a new ecosystem of innovation, collaborating across new networks, building on each other's ideas and growing organically."

Learn more about how both cities experienced Google's beta program from the original article at **www.utilitysp.net/gig-city**

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Does your city have a story to share?

Do you have a story to share about your city, our program or a question about resources and best practices? Share your ideas and questions with Hayley Martin at hmartin@utilitysp.net or (724) 749-1042 and your city could be featured in our next quarterly newsletter.

Earthworm Resources

Continued from page 1.

Check the resources below for additional information on the benefits that earthworms bring to local communities.

- **The Worm Resource Centre**
  The Worm Research Centre provides objective information about the use of worms to benefit the environment and investigate their performance: **http://www.wormresearchcentre.co.uk**

- **Vermicomposting**
  Vermicomposting.com is one of many websites with how-to instructions for vermicomposting, benefits and facts about worms and composting: **http://vermicomposting.com**

- **Earthworm Resources**
  The University of Nebraska-Lincoln has developed several pages devoted to earthworms and vermicomposting, including how-to instructions for the construction of bins: **http://lancaster.unl.edu/pest/worms.shtml**

- **Acme Worm Farm**
  The Acme Worm Farm is a noted source for composting supplies and information: **http://acmewormfarm.com**

- **Worm Farm Guide**
  Information on how to get started composting and the different types of worms: **http://www.wormfarmguide.com**

Your USP Business Development Directory

Executive Management

Brad Carmichael
Vice President
724-749-1003
bcarmichael@utilitysp.net

Michael Conduff
National Account Executive
940-382-3945
mconduff@utilitysp.net

Program Support

John Matheny
Manager, Inside Sales
724-749-1087
jmatheny@utilitysp.net

Blake Stogner
Program Manager
214-552-4098
bstogner@utilitysp.net

Regional Account Managers

Jeff Olson
Nothwestern U.S./Canada
720-470-8037
jolson@utilitysp.net

Oscar Arras
Mid-Continent U.S.
214-632-6947
oarras@utilitysp.net

Michael Madden
Northeastern U.S.
407-616-2239
mmadden@utilitysp.net

Brian Davis
Southwestern U.S.
214-476-3430
bdavis@utilitysp.net

Mike Chambers
Mid-Western U.S.
724-678-6075
mchambers@utilitysp.net

Michael Madden
Southeastern U.S.
407-616-2239
mmadden@utilitysp.net

What would your walls say if they could speak?

Continued from page 1.

That's why we at USP were so intrigued with the newly released book ***Democracy at the Doorstep, Too!*** This compilation of true stories by women professionals in local government paints an impressive picture of the joys and travails experienced in their journeys to success. Developed by best selling author and USP National Account Executive, Mike Conduff, and his local government colleague, Melissa Byrne-Vossmer, as a follow up to ***Democracy at the Doorstep – True Stories from the Green Berets of Public Administration***.

ICMA's President Bonnie Svercek provided the foreword to the book and said "***Democracy at the Doorstep, Too! should be required reading for anyone interested in local government, especially if they are a woman.***"

Stories such as "One of Many Firsts" detail Jane Bais DiSessa, City Manager of Berkley, Michigan and Past President of the International Hispanic Network, about her experiences as the first female and first Hispanic manager in her community and the unique challenges she faced in the male-dominated field.

All net proceeds of the book go to support the ***Life, Well Run*** program at ICMA, which raises awareness for the value professional local government managers bring to communities.

"Our goal in developing this collection of stories was to emphasize the value that local government brings to delivering democracy," said Conduff. "Words cannot express our appreciation to the contributing authors. Without their incredibly generous support so many of these inspirational and entertaining stories would have gone untold."

Books can be purchased online at: www.DemocracyAtTheDoorstep.com or by email at Mike.Conduff@TheElimGroup.com. Reference this article to receive a discount of 25% off the retail price.