

## Best of the best: Bibb's water treatment plant plucks another award

BY KEICH WHICKER

For anyone in Bibb County who has ever taken a shower, watered their lawn or drank a glass of water, the liquid that made these activities possible flowed from pipes linking all the way back to the Frank C. Amerson Jr. Water Treatment Plant.

The plant, located around the Javors Lucas Lake just across the border in Jones County, recently picked up the Plant of the Year award - its third in six years - from the Georgia Association of Water Professionals.

Also, the water that the plant produces, which is pulled from the 625-acre Lucas Lake, was awarded best drinking water in a 50-county area.

"We're competing with some of the largest plants in the state ... so we take a lot of pride in it," said Tony Rojas, executive director of the Macon Water Authority. "We try to compete in these competitions. ... It makes you better at what you do, because you know you need to be taking care of your plants and have things in order. So it brings a value beyond pride and recognition."

Opened in 2000, the \$128 million plant is a collection of industrial buildings with humming machines and open-air facilities with softly churning bodies of water. All of it helps cleanse and then pump more than 15 million gallons of water per day to the authority's customer base.

Gary McCoy, the plant's director, bragged that he and the 15 or so employees who help run the facility produce the cleanest, best-tasting water in the state; it's just that the state doesn't take their word for it and checks up on them.

"Which is fine," he joked.

The inspection process behind the award is intense.

A team of officials from the state's association of water professionals spends a day scrutinizing just about everything at the plant that can be assessed, McCoy said.

Recalling how the plant lost out on an award one year because a water hose wasn't coiled and hung in the right place, McCoy said the inspection is "very thorough." The plant's score this year was slightly above a 98 out of 100 because the inspectors "have to find something," he added.

Criteria for the award includes treatment processes and safety, said Jack Dozier, executive director for the association of water professionals.

"These facilities are the best of the best," he said, describing the winners in a news release.

Both McCoy and Rojas credited the authority's employees for the success and recognition that keep coming its way.

"It's great to have the recognition," Rojas said. "It says that you've got good employees and that you're running your business and operations the way you ought to. ... It's the employees that help us get the plant awards. Those plants don't run themselves."

In fact, two employees - Jared Zellner at the Amerson plant and Larry Reynolds, who works at the reclamation facility on Lower Popular Street - were recognized by the association as outstanding plant operators.

"We have a history of operators winning those awards," Rojas said.

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