



# *NEWS RELEASE*

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
September 18, 2015

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## **Steve Mueller Recognized as Drinking Water Distribution Operator of the Year at State-wide Event**

### *2015 Operators of the Year named in Springfield*

**Springfield, IL** –The Illinois Potable Water Supply Operators Association and the Illinois Environmental Protection Agency recognized nine outstanding professionals in their individual categories of service. These operators produce and supply drinking water for Illinois public water supply consumers.

Drinking water professionals and guests of the Illinois Potable Water Operators Association (IPWSOA) honored **Steve Mueller, City of Columbia**, as Distribution Operator of the Year. **Steve Fletcher, Washington County Water Company**, and **James Parkhill, Village of Bluford**, were named finalists for the top spot. All three were recognized for their outstanding work in supplying safe drinking water on a daily basis to consumers, as well as their contributions to the industry and community.

Operators are rated on the day-to-day operation of facilities that pump surface water or groundwater from their water source and distribute it to consumers. "Operator of the Year" is the highest professional honor an operator can receive in recognition of service and performance in the waterworks industry. In addition, finalists are designated in each category.

**Steve Mueller**, Water Superintendent for the **City of Columbia**, was selected as Operator of the Year in the Distribution Category. Mueller has 31 years of experience in the water industry, and holds a Class B Water Supply Operator Certificate. He is responsible for all maintenance of the distribution system, as well as installation of new water main. Mueller supervises 6 personnel who assist in the operation and maintenance of the water system. His letter of nomination commended him as "a dedicated employee that is passionate about his job, always concerned about the quality of water that is being supplied to the City's customers. Steve always makes sure the water department is running smoothly, day, night, all hours of the night; he will call in on his days off because he has a strange feeling. Steve is the type of employee every employer wishes they had and he is irreplaceable."

The City of Columbia purchases treated water and provides it to 3,963 service connections through 80 miles of water main. The facility includes 4 water storage tanks, 2 pumping stations and 629 fire hydrants that require operation and maintenance as well.

There are approximately 4000 certified drinking water operators in the State of Illinois. These operators were nominated and selected by owners, operators and other professionals in the drinking water industry. Finalists are then reviewed by other certified drinking water operators who serve on the Operator of the Year Nomination and Final Selection Committees of IPWSOA. Winners and finalists are nominated by their peers, screened by a pre-selection committee, and chosen by a second committee that interviews nominees at their facilities during a fly-around of the state. Committee members, all operators, use a numeric system to rate nominees. The results are then tallied, and winners finalized by computer.

Operators of the Year and nominees were honored during the Association's 84th annual conference at the President Abraham Lincoln Hotel in Springfield. Members from all areas of the state met to stay current on new industry regulations, equipment and processes. Winners of the 2015 awards were announced and received their trophies during the three day event.

Speakers and displays at the 2015 conference focused on safe operation; compliance with State and federal regulations; and new operational and analytical techniques and equipment.

The Illinois Environmental Protection Agency and the IPWSOA co-sponsor the conference. The Agency oversees operations of approximately 1,800 public water supplies serving Illinois and their compliance with federal and state drinking water regulations.