case study

Badger® ORION® Shines in Coastal Community

By Kevin Orfield

Nestled on the Georgia coast, midway between Savannah and Jacksonville, lies the mainland city Brunswick and four barrier islands: St. Simons Island, Sea Island, Little St. Simons Island and Jekyll Island. Pictured to the left is the lighthouse located on St. Simons Island.

A coastal community located in the extreme southeastern part of Georgia, Glynn County is a popular tourist destination – so popular, the population of St. Simons Island nearly doubles around the Fourth of July and at other peak times during the year.

People are drawn to Glynn County's historic seaport, Brunswick, with its brick streets and historic buildings, and to the four Golden Isles, with their beaches and year-round resorts.

Water has played an integral role in Glynn County's history. Water recreation has brought enjoyment and revenue to the area over the years. Water metering, on the other hand, eventually posed a problem for the thriving community and its leaders. In 2004, Glynn County's aging metering system was not standardized, composed of meters of different brands and sizes.

"We had meters in the ground that were 30-years old and not very accurate," said Becky Rowell, assistant county administrator, Glynn County, Georgia. "Our customers did not have one hundred percent trust in their water bills. And we had water that was not being accounted for, which meant lost revenue. We thought it was a good time to make the switch to an automatic meter reading system (AMR)."

Badger® ORION® stars on tour of the coast

To help determine whether to switch to Badger ORION, Rowell and her team met with the Public Works and Utilities Department staff of the City of Melbourne, Florida, a coastal community similar to Glynn County. Like Glynn County, Melbourne was susceptible to hurricanes and had recently experienced a major storm.

Melbourne had installed many brands of meters and tracked performance for over a year. According to their research, Badger Meter's ORION system with Badger Recordall® Transmitter Registers (RTR®) was clearly the most reliable system, as well as the easiest to install and maintain.

Melbourne Utilities Department supervisors took Rowell's group out to read a route. "We were very impressed with the system," said Rowell. "It was everything we were looking for, and based on our visit to Melbourne, we chose to buy Badger ORION. In fact, our commission approved making it the sole source for all of Glynn County."

Greater accuracy and efficiency

Badger ORION delivers the greater accuracy Glynn County needs, and with Badger Meter's RTR® register, better resolution. "We're very pleased with the accuracy," says Rowell. "When we tell people we're reading with a computer, there's no arguing any more."

Badger ORION also provides faster meter reading, improving efficiency while reducing costs. "The system is very efficient," said Rowell. "The meter readers have been able to take on some additional duties because they are reading their routes so fast."

"We had three meter readers and one left. We haven't needed to replace him and we're doing great. ORION simply saves you time and money."

Easy to install and use

Glynn County hired a contractor to install the meters. Installation began in May, 2005 and was completed by that November.

Eleven-thousand meters were installed. Eighty percent of the original meters were replaced, while the other 20 percent were retrofitted. If a meter was more than 10 years old and had registered more than 1.5 million gallons, it was replaced.

"Installation and retrofitting is easy with ORION," said Rowell.

One area of the community didn't receive the upgrade is a neighborhood that is undergoing a complete rehabilitation of its water and sewer system. "We're waiting until the rehab project is finished before we install the meters," said Rowell. "It's the only area where we're continuing to manually read meters, and you can really notice the difference. When you get the occasional misread, it's really hard to pin down because there wasn't a standard installation many years ago."

distributor profile

Carolina Meter & Supply

By Mark McMillen - Vice President, Carolina Meter & Supply

Carolina Meter and Supply is a company with a unique perspective on the water industry.

Founded in 1999 by veterans of the electric utility industry, our 20 years of technical sales/support experience in automatic meter reading systems enable us to assist utilities in the application of technology, analysis of information provided, and leveraging that information into knowledge for more efficient operations and utility management.

Operating as Carolina Meter and Supply, the employee-owned company specializes in needs assessment, sales, system implementation, training, and product support for AMR products throughout Virginia, North Carolina, and South Carolina.

Sales:
Mark McMillen, Vice President, leads our sales efforts in this region and supplements his 20 years of service to water, gas and electric utilities. Mark's Itron® and Badger® AMR system expertise is surpassed only by his customer loyalty and relationships. The efforts he and his team consistently make to bring customers the best possible solutions have earned them the respect of the market and its partners. His team includes:

Jody Cline: North Carolina….8 years of utility operation experience
Troy Cole: South Carolina….13 years of utility operations experience
Brad Bersch: Virginia…15 years experience with Badger Meter and utility sales

Staff:
Rich Gincel: ORION® Training/Technical Support
Kim Kashmerick: Customer Service Manager
Mike Stawski: Inventory Management/Accounting
Bob Mendez: Inventory/Asset Management
Robyn English: Receptionist/Staff Support

Officers:
Joan Kent: CFO
Wallace Hales: CEO
Mark McMillen: VP
Barry Hales: Branch Manager

Warehouses:
Hampstead, NC
Greenwood, SC
Smithfield, NC

Pictured Left to Right: Barry Hales, Mark McMillen, Joan Kent and Wallace Hales

Alliance Partners:
United Utilities: BMI distributor in TN, GA
MATCHPOINT: Automatic Meter Reading installation and support

The Mission
Carolina Meter and Supply specializes in technology-based applications to optimize the metering and billing functions and driving conservation through education and the application of technology. As we draw upon the skills of our current staff and peripheral relationships, we commit to continuing our legacy of strong customer relationships coupled with the very best product and service offering available. CMS partnerships with Badger Meter, Itron, and MATCHPOINT allow us to offer "turnkey" solutions to the full spectrum of utility customers.

The Future
As we consider the future of the water industry, we are convinced that key technologies will drive conservation and quality concerns much the same way we experienced them in the electrical utility industry. CMS is uniquely positioned to help your organization develop the strategies and services that will ensure your success both now and for years to come. ■

Leak detection a big hit
Using the optional leak detection feature, Glynn County can tailor Badger® ORION® to meet their needs. Every time a route is read, a report identifies customers with leak problems. A letter is mailed to each of these customers.

"Our leak reports and letters are very popular," said Rowell. "We have customers actually calling to thank us, and not just when we identify large leaks. It might only be a small leak – water that's going through a toilet 24 hours a day – but the consequences can be great."

"Leak detection is a real timesaver. Now when someone calls and asks about a $300 water bill, the first thing we'll do is look at the leak report and ask them if they got their letter. We love this feature."

Based on Glynn County's experience, the City of Brunswick is also switching over to ORION. "We definitely recommend ORION," said Rowell. "And we'd be glad to have any water municipality that is considering the system come pay us a visit." ■

Kevin Orfield is a freelance writer based in Thiensville, WI.