

LOCAL WATER SYSTEM ANTICIPATES GROWTH

Salmon Valley Water, a small family-run water system in northwest Oregon, has been servicing communities in the Mt. Hood Corridor since 1968. It started out providing a local mountain resort with water and evolved into a community system as the area grew. Today, Salmon Valley Water serves approximately 1,500 people through 950 connections.

According to Michael Bowman, Salmon Valley Water's general manager, the water business has changed dramatically over the past 50 years. "Smaller systems like ours are now being held to municipal standards, which drives up our costs," Bowman explains. "Plus, it's getting harder to secure funding for larger improvements."

Salmon Valley Water was also thinking about a succession plan — specifically, who they would like to run the company as key managers retired. "It was a big deal for us to identify who was going to take over," Bowman says. "Our roots in the area go back over 70 years, and we were looking for someone not just to buy the company, but to invest in the community, too."

Salmon Valley Water finds a partner

Because of its strong ties in the area, Salmon Valley Water felt a partner must meet the following criteria: understand the community, provide a high level of customer service, have a proven track record, and retain the current staff. The partner company also had to be well capitalized and in a position to make system improvements.

After considering multiple organizations, Salmon Valley Water chose NW Natural Water. The company is part of NW Natural Holdings, which also operates NW Natural Gas — a fact that Salmon Valley Water valued. The gas utility's 160-year history and high J.D. Power and Associates ranking



made it a top contender. "Its strong reputation as a business and in the community made the decision to partner with them a lot easier," Bowman explains.

Infrastructure improvements underway

As the Mt. Hood Corridor continues to grow, Salmon Valley Water will need to invest in infrastructure — which has already started. Now that Salmon Valley Water is working with NW Natural Water, the company is able to move forward on projects to help improve service.

For example, Salmon Valley Water has been able to add a new well. Bringing on a well is one of the most involved projects in the water business. If the company hadn't partnered with NW Natural Water, the project would have been delayed, which can create compliance issues. "We probably would have been forced to postpone the project for about four to five years," says Bowman.

More resources, more support

Smaller water systems often experience unique challenges to keep up with legal, regulatory and compliance issues, and employees often fill multiple roles to keep things running smoothly. Since partnering with NW Natural Water, Salmon Valley has access to extensive legal expertise. "Now we have the knowledge and resources we need, which is incredible," says Bowman.

The company can also connect with specialists via NW Natural Water that offer broad technical and scientific knowledge. Due to resource and funding constraints, smaller water systems often have trouble connecting with the best engineering, geology and hydrology firms. Since the acquisition that's no longer a problem. "Now I'm working with the best in the state," says Bowman.

A THRIVING PARTNERSHIP

Salmon Valley Water and NW Natural Water collaborate on not just maintaining the system, but growing it to meet the community's demands. "Since partnering with NW Natural Water — I can tell you as a key person in a 'before and after' role — our community is much better off today."

— Michael Bowman, Salmon Valley Water general manager