

THE INDUSTRY BENEATH YOUR FEET

by Gary Bryant, Senior Vice President and National Sales Manager

A number of years ago I attended a conference for people in the water utility industry where, by coincidence, a large public works project was underway in close proximity to the convention center. I observed numerous attendees making daily inspections of the contractor's progress as they entered or exited the building. Eventually the sidewalk adjoining the work area became a gathering place for folks; one might view this as an occupational hazard. You see a utility crew working in an open trench and curiosity gets the better of you.

The reality is the average person has little knowledge of the complex maze of piping systems and information networks that lie below our public streets. Even fewer people give much thought to the thousands of companies and employees that are an important element of our nation's economy.

The past decade has seen the high tech bubble expand and burst. We have experienced record highs and lows with energy costs. Even basic manufacturing businesses were forced

to reinvent themselves in order to compete in a global marketplace. Yet during this time of economic extremes, the underground utility profession has quietly tended to its business by growing at a strong and stable rate. Low interest rates have led to record construction of new homes. As the outlying suburbs expand, the inter city's infrastructure must upgrade to accommodate the growth. The housing industry and the public works industry, along with the manufacturers and

distributors that supply them, represent a vital segment of our nation's economy.

So the next time you find yourself detoured around those orange barrels that surround most construction sites, slow down and give them a little extra room for safety. Your nation's economy is at work. And watch out for any curious onlookers who may be peering in the open hole; it's most likely one of my colleagues.



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