

Time to Reflect

By Thomas Hodson, Sr. Vice President, Marketing and Sales

In a word, 1998 can be described as a fantastic year for The Ford Meter Box Company, Inc. After a slow start caused by El Niño, business has been excellent. Raw material costs have remained



reasonably stable, our new products have been well received in the marketplace, and we were honored to join the ranks of other centenarian waterworks

companies. We attempted to reach out to as many of you as possible to help us celebrate our anniversary, and we thank you for making our year-long celebration special.

Enough said about the past, what about the future? Economists, by virtue of their profession, are required to prognosticate the future by the use of numerous statistical data. Since I am not being held to that same strict standard, I am simply going to predict that 1999, economically, will be almost a duplicate of this year. Some may consider that “no growth,” and thus a pessimistic forecast; however, I prefer to look at it as a solid year produced by a solid U.S. economy.

What I really want to do in this article is highlight some of the important issues in the waterworks industry I feel will need to be addressed in the future. Our approach to these matters will determine our success. The next century offers many challenges and thus opportunities for those who are successful in stepping forward with solutions.

- The world's increasing population will place increasing demands on water resources, and we must learn to intelligently reuse our water

supplies. Water utilities will face the challenge of dual distribution systems and of controlling cross connections and contamination.

- Water quality standards will continue to be strengthened and indirect additive issues must be resolved. The scientific community will more accurately determine the effect of minute amounts of trace elements found in drinking water. Those elements that are harmful must be eliminated.
- Water systems are aging to the point of requiring extreme maintenance or total replacement. New materials will be asked to handle higher water pressures, last longer, and meet increasingly stringent regulations.
- Water utilities who are accustomed to solving their problems quietly and quickly will need to learn how to operate with total public scrutiny. Water utility customers will decide whether or not they have enough confidence in the water supply to consume the water as they will have a choice of many brands of bottled water and home filters.
- Utilities unable to cope with the financial requirements to maintain and/or renovate their water systems will continue to look to the private sector for solutions. Private and publicly traded water companies will increase their holdings of public utilities with assets or water rights to sell. Foreign companies will increase their investments in U.S. water utilities.

The Ford Meter Box Company, Inc. intends not only to survive, but also to excel in this industry for another 100 years. We will do what we can to be a part of the solution and not part of the problem. The challenges and opportunities will be great indeed.



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