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Wednesday, Sept. 26, American Public Works Association evaluators (from left) Thomas Brady of Brookline Mass., Kim Thur of Vancouver, Wash., Randell Brown of White Settlement, Texas, Patricia Copeland of Bettendorf, Iowa, and Ann Daniels of Kansas City, Mo., break the good news to the Mohave County Public Works staff in Kingman that the department passed evaluation with flying colors and will receive APWA accreditation.

Mohave County Public Works becomes sixth county in U.S. to receive APWA accreditation

KINGMAN – The American Public Works Association (APWA) completed an evaluation review of the Mohave County Public Works Department Wednesday, Sept. 26, and has recommended national accreditation.

“This is the culmination of a long, involved process,” Director Mike Hendrix said. “Only a little more than 40 public works agencies from cities and counties have received APWA accreditation in North America. Now, Mohave County has joined that list. We are only the sixth county in the U.S. to garner this achievement, with our neighbors, Coconino County, Ariz., and Clark County, Nev., being two of the other five.”

A five-member APWA Evaluation Team spent three days reviewing the policies and procedures of the Mohave County Public Works Department before concluding this agency deserves full accreditation.

“Congratulations on a job very well-done,” Evaluation Team Leader Patricia Copeland said Wednesday, Sept. 26. Copeland is the public works coordinator and accreditation manager for the City of Bettendorf, Iowa, “You are to be commended. You have nine Model Practices. Other agencies will be looking at those for reference. You have a total of 383 total practices with 376 which are fully compliant. Seven will take very little work” to become fully compliant. “I will make my report recommending full accreditation with APWA.”

The APWA benchmarks public works departments with the best Public Works Policies and Procedures throughout North America, Mohave County Public Works Director Mike Hendrix said. “The APWA

Accreditation Process is a voluntary, self-motivated approach to improving our organization. It will help us strive for continuous improvement by establishing performance standards and measurement systems, increase our effectiveness and efficiency, formalize policies and procedures, increase our level of professionalism and develop a proactive management system.”

Hendrix was interim director for close to three years before becoming director in October of 2002. He was introduced to the APWA Accreditation Program during his interim years and found it intriguing in that the organization’s total focus was on “quality management in engineering, public works and infrastructure; the things we normally provide.

“When I was asked if I was interested in becoming director, I said I believed our organization was strong but could be improved,” he said. “That is why I embraced the development of an Office of Management and Budget (OMB) so strongly – because it helped us improve. I presented my case for APWA along with other proposals for improvement to Mohave County Manager Ron Walker. He said that was exactly what he wanted to have for the whole county – change for the better through total quality management.”

Hendrix began an education process that took his whole department through updating policies, procedures and practices.

“I named a Marri Lunquist to be our APWA accreditation coordinator,” he said. “She eventually became an evaluator for other public works agencies. That helped us with first-hand knowledge of others’ processes. We then invited others with expertise to come to Mohave County and do a mock evaluation on how we might stack up for accreditation. We did very well then and those lessons were valuable in our success now. I want to thank every member of Mohave County Public Works, the best staff ever, and every employee of Mohave County that we have worked so closely with over the years in serving the public.”

Evaluator Thomas Brady, a conservation administrator with the state of Massachusetts, said, “From the first moment that we met someone from this agency onsite at the County Administration Building, it has been clear throughout the agency the level of professionalism and the level of effort you put into your work. All your work that you put into that process paid off and it is clear that the work you put in on a daily basis is extraordinary.”

Evaluator Kim Thur, executive assistant for the Clark Regional Wastewater District in Vancouver, Wash., said, “It was a pleasure coming to your organization and seeing how much work you put into the process.”

Evaluator Randell Brown, director of public works for the City of White Settlement, Texas, said he thought the operative words for Mohave County Public Works were “wonderful, impressive, awesome,” and that he was “envious. I would love to work for an organization like this. I’ve spent most of my career looking for an organization like this. And you’re to be highly commended, especially Mike for his leadership allowing you to do what you do. You are some of the best qualified people I’ve seen. I’m taking back a lot of things that I have learned. Thank you.”

APWA Director of Technical Services Ann Daniels summed up the announcement Wednesday, “This has been a real joy for each of us. You will be the 44<sup>th</sup> accredited agency in North America. The key thing that everyone has touched on is the sincerity of the people in this organization. They all know what they are doing and they are doing it well. I was very pleased to visit with two of your county supervisors. When Pete Byers visited with me, the support and respect that he has for all of you is just phenomenal and you are fortunate to have that. Every one of you who has had a part in this process – this is your accreditation. You’ve earned it.”

Mohave County is the fourth agency in Arizona to receive accreditation, Daniels said, now joining the cities of “Chandler and Tucson and Coconino County.”

APWA will make a formal presentation during the October 15 meeting of the Mohave County Board of Supervisors in Kingman.

“I’m extremely pleased that a national unbiased organization came to Mohave County and confirmed what I believed all along about the quality and performance of our professionals in Public Works,” Walker said. “It’s really great to see that they are getting the outside acclaims that they so well deserve after all the years and years of hard work. I’m extremely proud of them.

“We set our goals back in January of 2002 to make this a higher quality, higher performing organization,” he said, “and we are achieving that across the board.”

“As an organization, we are certainly not perfect,” Hendrix said, “however, we have come a long way. And through this APWA process, we know there is tremendous potential for continued improvement, and that’s what it is all about.”