

## **An abundance of gratitude for an essential service**

By Rebekah Eastep and Katie Cullipher

What has kept you going over the past 15 months? A steaming hot shower or relaxing soak in the tub? Baking bread or planting flowers? Maybe it's been an afternoon coffee or tea break. All of these activities involve one common denominator—water.

June 30 is Annual Drinking Water and Wastewater Professionals Appreciation Day in Virginia. Please join [askHRgreen.org](http://askHRgreen.org) in thanking our essential water and wastewater employees of Hampton Roads, who keep the taps flowing and commodes going—especially during the coronavirus pandemic! Now more than ever, we are keenly aware of the value of this most precious resource and how it supports public health, our local economy and our overall quality of life.

In Hampton Roads, our public water systems consist of a complex network of miles and miles of underground pipes. This unseen infrastructure ensures the safe and reliable supply of water to our homes, businesses and hospitals every day of the year.

Collecting, storing, treating and delivering water to and from homes and commercial enterprises are the jobs of the region's municipal water utilities and the Hampton Roads Sanitation District (HRSD). In our region, the public water systems are supported by 12 drinking water treatment plants, with more than 100 wells and 23 reservoirs storing over 34 billion gallons of water. Once this water is used, more than 1,500 pump stations carry sewage to the 13 wastewater treatment plants across the region to be treated for safe release back into local waterways and groundwater.

While the pandemic forced many Hampton Roads services and businesses to close for a time, our water utilities never shut down. For that, we are grateful for our local treatment plant operators and lab technicians, who treated and monitored our water for safety. We appreciate the construction crews and engineers, who kept the pipes maintained. And we thank the employees, who read our meters and took our calls.

Many essential water and wastewater employees worked through difficult circumstances this past year due to social distancing guidelines and staff quarantines. This sometimes meant these workers had to do more work with less help, and yet they never failed to deliver a safe, reliable service to area residents. Our water and wastewater professionals worked tirelessly (often without mention) to ensure their community had an abundance of water during a time when we needed it most.

If you are looking for a rewarding career with good benefits and the chance to serve your community, consider working for water. And to the workers, who bring this service to us every day, allow us to raise a glass of refreshing tap water to salute you! Thank you for the essential service you provide and for keeping us going in so many ways.

*Katie Cullipher and Rebekah Eastep lead the askHRgreen.org public awareness and education campaign for the Hampton Roads Planning District Commission. For ways to make an environmental difference every day, visit [www.askHRgreen.org](http://www.askHRgreen.org)*

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