

## A Year to Remember

by Robert Boyle, IANY President



Robert "RB" Boyle

There is an old saying that goes like this: "All work and no play makes Jack a dull boy."

The season started early with warm March weather. The restrictions from the virus caused me to reduce my staff, and up to this point I have worked every day since the beginning of March.

I am sharing my experience with you not to complain, but rather to relate the effects of the virus had on my business.

I am very thankful that I have been able to work as many others have not been so fortunate.

This season has been anything but dull. When the restrictions were put into place, we submitted paperwork to New York State with the help of Ideal Consulting to request irrigation be granted the status of essential business. We got it!

As president of IANY, the question of whether we could work and how we could work were major concerns. Every day brought different news with challenges and changes in the restrictions. For those who inquired with IANY and our members, we made it known we had a letter that could be kept as proof that were deemed essential and were to follow state guidelines.

We heard from New Jersey and Connecticut contractors, and became aware that each state was handling the crisis a little differently. We were cautious not to send the wrong message based on the sometimes-fluctuating messages that came from the state because of the seriousness of the virus.

In my company we followed the guidelines very closely. At one point I was the only one working. Then we were able to have technicians working alone, scheduling only those homes that we did not have to go inside to do our work.

As time went on, we made appointments with our clients that were ok with us going inside their homes. Our staff was set up with masks, gloves, wipes and a full understanding to respect the client's wishes.

Being in the field interacting with clients and associates during the pandemic was interesting. I was able to get a better perspective of how people were being affected by the virus, the restrictions and all the changes.

As a rule, our interactions were very good, some people were rather inviting, and others were extremely cautious and would not even open their door.

We are still wearing masks but not gloves. We are short-staffed but optimistic and hopeful for all our futures and very thankful to be working!

*RB Boyle is owner of RB Irrigation and president of the Irrigation Association of New York.*

## Essential-Business Status

Here is the response from Empire State Development to the request for essential-business status for irrigation contractors.

Dear Business Owner:

Thank you for seeking designation as an "essential business" pursuant to the revised New York State Executive Order 202.6 with respect to your business function of irrigation services. Based on the information you have provided, that business function is an essential business and/or supports an essential business and is not subject to the required 100% workforce reduction pursuant to the revised

Executive Order 202.6. However, your business has been designated as essential solely with respect to those employees that must be present at the business location in support of essential business activities. No other employees/personnel shall be permitted to work from your business's location. Any other business activities being completed at your location that are not essential are still subject to the revised Executive Order 202.6. Please continue to comply with all other Executive Orders and recommendations from the New York State Department of Health and please consider reducing your in-person workforce to the extent practicable.



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# IANY and IA in Cooperation Agreement

The Irrigation Association of New York (IANY) and the national Irrigation Association (IA) have joined forces to improve both organizations.



IANY is now the third state organization to align with the IA. The first was the Carolinas Irrigation Association, followed by the Irrigation Association of New England.

There are many benefits to this alliance.

- Administrative support
- National IA know-how and contacts

- National IA support to unify the entire state of New York
- Advertising support
- Event support
- Membership benefits
- Improved reach to contractors and associations.

There will be more benefits as time moves forward.

We look forward to working directly with IA to improve conditions for IANY. In addition, we look forward to new members and their involvement to foster a better industry.

IANY's board will continue to work hard improving our reach and being proactive.

If you have additional questions, please call the Irrigation Association 703-536-7080 or visit [www.irrigation.org](http://www.irrigation.org)



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## The COVID-19 Challenge: A National Perspective

by John Farner

Since the first congressional action regarding coronavirus was signed into law on March 6, 2020, the landscape-irrigation industry has been impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic in many different ways throughout the United States. And as states now continue their efforts to promote economic growth, while mitigating the spread of COVID-19, we are seeing additional challenges to meet the various health requirements being implemented in many states.



John Farner

First, the landscape-irrigation industry is a resilient industry. We've faced adversity in the past and will continue to do so in the future. We, as an industry, confronted the health and economic challenges head-on. In states like New York, the challenge to get through the initial shutdown was great. In other states, some companies decided to temporarily cease operations to ensure their workers' and customers' safety. What brings us together is our commitment to one another. Whether it's our

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# The COVID-19 Challenge: A National Perspective

by John Farner

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industry, our employees, our customers or our society, the landscape-irrigation industry remains strong and committed to the future of our businesses.

However, many challenges remain. As Congress currently has a new coronavirus relief package under consideration, we face economic uncertainty moving forward. While the debate on mandatory masks is happening at state and local levels (in some states, outdoor masks are required when social distancing is not possible), Congress continues to address ways to assist small businesses through (again) expanding the Paycheck Protection Program and limiting employer liability on employees contracting the coronavirus. As the IA continues its advocacy efforts, we released our Framework for Economic Recovery, <https://www.irrigation.org/IA/FileUploads/IA/Advocacy/IA-Framework-for-Economic-Recovery.pdf> earlier this year, which outlines steps that need to be taken by Congress to ensure our industry remains strong through the longevity of the pandemic and beyond.

The good news is that in many areas of the United States the landscape business is strong. We are seeing a backlog of business that will bring our work well into the fall months. This sign of strength and interest in our business showcases the sustainability of landscape irrigation. Never before have homeowners valued their home and outdoor spaces as they do today. It's our job to make sure this increased value in the managed landscape does not go away.

The IA will continue to partner with state associations, such as IANY, to promote the value of the landscape irrigation industry, while ensuring our ability to do business remains viable and safe. We continue to be in a situation where we will get through this together. We are convinced we will be stronger for it once this pandemic is a distant memory.

*John Farner is the national Irrigation Association's Government and Public Affairs Director.*



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## To Continue Working During the Pandemic ...

A number of approaches were taken by irrigation contractors to continue serving customers. The traditional approach was a tech and helper, but traveling in two vehicles. An option was having the tech do the outside work while having the homeowner adjust the indoors controller, communicating by cell phone. Of course, smart devices eliminate the need for anyone to enter the home.



*D2A's truck followed by the helper's car.  
Something like a yacht followed by its dinghy?*

## Mike Dwyer Reporting ...



*Mike Dwyer*

Mike Dwyer, CIC, owner of Hot Water Aplenty and an IANY board member, regularly attends and reports on irrigation-industry and affiliate-organization activities. His accounts of New York American Water and Long Island Water Conference events follow.

### NEW YORK AMERICAN WATER TEACHING SERIES

I helped develop the teaching series with New York American Water. This year's topic was cloud-based smart controllers. It was held at the Cradle of Aviation Museum on February 11, with 43 contractors and 21 water-conference and water-district representatives attending. I envisioned this class to cover some of the common issues that we contractors are running into.



I thank Hunter, HydroRain, Rachio and Rain Bird for their participation. Also AGC Irrigation Supply, Central Tuf &



*Blue Angels Wannabes*

Irrigation Supply, East Coast Sprinkler Supply, and SiteOne Landscape Supply for displaying products.

Cloud-based smart controllers have the potential to make the contractor's life easier during the busy season. The purpose of a smart controller is to respond to the weather conditions to apply

only the amount of water necessary for a healthy landscape. Hotter/drier weather more water, cooler/cloudy less water.

When first setting them up you should be programming them for your July run time schedule. Why July? July historically is our hottest and driest month on Long Island. Last season was the first time I had a smart controller for the whole season and had some small learning events. I have customers with pots on decks and planting beds under roof lines. Last year we had consistent rainfall. The rain sensor was keeping the systems off, pots/plants were stressing or dying. I had to change programming. The answer was to disable the rain sensor for those zones.

Many smart controllers use a predictive-rainfall feature. This uses forecasted rain to determine watering. If there is a high probability of rain, the controller may skip a watering cycle. You can adjust most programs to the percentage of probability (80 percent, 90 percent or 100 percent) of rain to use to skip a watering cycle. If you have a property that dries out fast, you may want to have the threshold high or the predictive feature turned off, and use a properly installed rain sensor to stop/prevent a watering cycle.

I wanted contractors to understand how the cloud-based smart controllers work.

There is an old saying about computers: garbage in garbage out. Meaning if you program the controller incorrectly, it is not going to do what you want it to do.



*Bagels And A Class*

# Water Conference Report

The Long Island Water Conference is not having any in-person meetings due to COVID-19. When everything was shut down, I was invited to join a three-times-a-week conference phone call instead.

The purpose was to make sure everyone was aware of what was going on in the water-district world. Participants were from the Nassau and Suffolk departments of health, New York State departments of health and environmental conservation, laboratory services and engineering services. Topics of discussion included personal protective equipment (PPE), disinfectants, supply-chain issues of operational chemicals and how to safely carry on their important work.

Everybody contributed ideas how to run crews and office staff. Nassau County's Office of Emergency Management initially was the only source for PPE and cleaning chemicals for Nassau water districts. Suffolk County had a very similar system for emergencies.

Early on there was a thought to ban irrigation during this time. I pointed out that as whole, no water district was experiencing any supply-chain issues with water treatment chemicals. I would have understood if chemicals were in short supply. I also pointed out that we generally do backflow tests



at turn-on. The state's health department agreed to not require tests of residential interior backflows due to safety concerns.

## Recent News

The State Department of Health just set the standard for 1,4-Dioxane, PFOAs and PFOS. PFOAs and PFOS are easy to remove with existing technology of granular-activated charcoal. The 1,4-Dioxane is an expensive contaminant to remove from our water supply. Water districts are working on treatment systems. All water districts on Long Island except the Massapequa Water District have at least one well that needs treatment. Some impacted districts are close to being ready to remove 1,4-Dioxane as I write this. Others are under construction, and a few are still in design stage. Why am I telling you this? It will impact our customers by raising prices for water.

Start using smart controllers. Take a design class to install more water-efficient systems. Separate flower and shrub beds from lawn areas. Use rain or soil-moisture sensors.



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## Six Surprises from COVID-19 for Irrigation Contractors

by Jeff Carowitz



Jeff Carowitz

Economy in recession. Irrigation sales soar!

While the pandemic has caused unprecedented economic, job-market and personal dislocations, product shortages and heartbreaking illness and death, the irrigation industry is being impacted differently than many small businesses. Here are six illustrations.

**Record-Breaking Sales** - Stay-at-home customers are investing in landscape improvements and completing long-deferred maintenance. As a result, contractors specializing in custom-residential work are "booked full," and service crews are working overtime to keep up with hot-weather demand. A move to more permanent "work-from-home" and "retirement cocooning" will keep this trend strong in 2021.

**Employees Available!** - It's getting easier to find qualified laborers as other related industries have experienced cutbacks. Find qualified candidates from general contracting, auto repair and restaurant businesses. Score candidates you're interviewing on values, skills and abilities to deliver results to make logical – not emotional – hiring decisions.

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# Six Surprises from COVID-19 for Irrigation Contractors

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by Jeff Carowitz

**Remote Irrigation Management Takes Off** - As consumers and contractors become more familiar with app-based technology, the move to WiFi-based controls has accelerated. Now systems can be checked and reprogrammed without going to the customer's property.

**Paperless Technology Finally Embraced** - Software that allows contractors to dispatch workers remotely, to schedule customer appointments without office staff and to collect touchless payments is finally taking off as teams proactively adapt to social distancing. (example: ServiceTitan)

**Stretched Supervisors** - Companies are asking a lot of their field supervisors: compressed job schedules, on-the-job training of rookie workers and lots of overtime. Some forward-thinking vendors are offering more resources and training materials to

help your middle managers succeed, and new materials to help rookies quickly learn jobsite skills.

**Going Deep, Instead of Wide** - Contractors who offer a diverse menu of services are doing better than those who specialize. Consider expanding into additional residential products and services to "go deeper" in meeting all of your clients' needs. Plus, professionalize your marketing (update that tired website!) so clients know all that you currently offer.

Brake lights ahead. We will see slowing in the commercial, municipal and sports-turf sectors in 2021 and increased competition in residential markets. I've prepared a free guidebook you can use to evaluate your business top-to-bottom. Be ready to succeed in a COVID-impacted world. Get a copy here. <https://bit.ly/2DOftRz>

*In a rapidly changing market, Jeff Carowitz is helping landscape businesses keep their work pipelines full with comprehensive marketing programs. Find him on LinkedIn or at Jeff@StrategicForceMarketing.com.*

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## Marketing in Good Times and Bad

by Lorraine Hart



Lorraine Hart

One thing we pretty much know is that people are spending more time at home, thinking about ways to improve their surroundings. Therefore, there is still an opportunity to modify our business strategies and thrive. We may have to change many of our old habits and ways of thinking. Just because people aren't beating down the doors, doesn't mean that no one is interested in using your services.

We all must adjust and shift our focus and communication strategies to accommodate our current situation. We need to take this opportunity to promote ourselves and our services. We must help our potential clients to see the advantages of using your services now or getting on the list for the near future.

**Now more than ever, it is important to increase business-marketing efforts using all marketing and social-media tools available, including your website.** Social-media marketing is a huge potential asset to businesses. Having a planned and executed social-media marketing strategy reinforces your

brand consistently across all media platforms. It is a highly efficient way to communicate with your customers and reach your target audience.

Your website speaks volumes about your brand. It is the most important sales and marketing tool your business has. That's why having a well-designed and regularly updated website is essential for building your business.

**Even if you feel you have enough business, don't ignore or cut back on your promotion or stop communicating.** Instead, increase your promotions and communications. This will show that you are confident in your own ability to survive, and will help improve the confidence of everyone that you are communicating to.

We have website and social-media marketing solutions to help build your brand, regularly engage with your clients and generate new leads.

*Lorraine Hart, president of Ideal Consulting Services, can be reached at 516-382-0862 or [lorraine@idealconsulting.net](mailto:lorraine@idealconsulting.net). Ideal Consulting is designer and host of IANY's website.*

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