



Winter education

by Bobby Winter, IANY President

As we gear up for the 2024 season, I'm excited to introduce new products and services to our clients.

Education is of utmost importance to all of us, and we took full advantage of the 2023-2024 offseason to attend local classes and the 2024 Northeast Expo for an incredible educational experience. Connecting with leading educators in the industry has inspired us to improve our educational services for the 2024 - 2025 off-season.

Investing in education is essential, and it is encouraged to do the same. It is understood that some may feel it's not in the budget, but now is the perfect time to make room for an educational budget. If properly planned, there are a variety of ways to help balance the costs. Better service is promoted and provided by educating each of the staff. This will ultimately benefit the clients.

In addition to our efforts, we're collaborating with leading supply houses and manufacturers to offer CIT (Certified Irrigation Technician) courses and exams, business courses, and a structured split layout of advanced and beginner irrigation classes for the 2024-2025 offseason. However, we need your support to return educational services and trade shows to Long Island.

Let's embrace the new season with a renewed commitment to education and strive to transform industry standards into something even better.

Bobby Winter is owner of B&A Lawn Sprinklers and president of the Irrigation Association of New York.

Photos: The Northeast Irrigation Expo and Conference was held Feb. 20-21. Nearly 200 attendees participated in education sessions, a trade show and a bit of fun.



Would you like to contribute to the IANY newsletter?

Have content you'd like to share? Have tips and tricks that would benefit the profession? Looking to reach irrigation contractors in the New York area?

Contact Noreen Rich (noreenrich@irrigation.org) to be featured or advertise in upcoming editions.



Meet the new Water Conference Chairman

by Mike Dwyer, CID, Hot Water Aplenty

Meet the New Chairman of The Long Island Water Conference West Hempstead Water Superintendent Jason Belle.

Mr. Belle was born in Queens and his parents moved to Franklin Square. He graduated H. Frank Carey H.S. and went to work for West Hempstead Water. He worked his way up from entry level to become the Superintendent. He holds a NYS 1B operator license and passed the Superintendent civil service test to be eligible.

His goal as chairman is to keep the membership at the forefront of education in the water industry. Every week something new is proposed as a regulation or modification of existing practices. The need for communication with water users is of paramount importance. Customers need to hear how to save water. They also need to know what contaminants are in the water and are being removed.

Mr. Belle feels it is important to promote the water industry as a viable job opportunity. We in our industry also know it is difficult to attract and keep employees. It is very difficult to find an employee who wants to grow and move up the ladder.



Photo: The need for communication with water users is of paramount importance. Customers need to hear how to save water.

Mr. Belle's goal as Chariman of the Water Conference is to keep the membership at the forefront of education in the water industry.



Photo: West Hempstead Water Superintendent Jason Belle.

When Mr. Belle was just starting out in the water company, he would go to a customer house that was complaining of high water use. He would inspect the house for water leaks and ultimately find that the customer had irrigation running twice a day. This is way before we started using cycle and soak. Water is deemed as infinite and cheap. This is an idea we need to change. Use what you need, don't waste needs to be our mantra in the irrigation business.

Mike Dwyer, CIC, is with Hot Water Aplenty. He currently serves on the IANY Board of Directors and leads the IANY Water Conference Committee.

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4 for 2024

by Jeff Carowitz, Strategic Force Marketing

A note of thanks to the leadership of IANY for allowing me to share some glimpses of the opportunities I am tackling with my clients. I hope IANY members are able to profit from these thought-starters.

1) Preparing Your Inside Team for Spring Overload

You know the drill. Spring irrigation service means a deluge of phone calls in a very short window of time, stressing everyone in your organization. Often companies prepare things (tools, inventory) for the surge, but neglect teamwork. Some ideas to think about:

Gather your team and discuss improving first impressions with incoming callers. Stop telegraphing your overwhelmed schedule, and instead make them feel appreciated and cared for. This will require some deep breaths and some acting. Thought starter: How can you make the caller think you're doing your absolute best to find them a priority service time (even when your schedule is really busy)?

They're stressed too. Discuss ways to show empathy for callers who are perplexed and upset by their irrigation dilemmas. For example, a magic phrase is "I'm sorry to hear that". It acknowledges that you can't solve the issue on the phone, but lets the customer know you care.

2) Treat New Installation Leads Like Gold

Why? There will be fewer incoming leads this season. But don't take my word for it. Google offers access to search trend data. The consumer search trends for landscape projects and new pool construction point to fewer projects ahead, and thus fewer leads for irrigation contractors.

We've had so much demand for the last 5 years that good salesmanship wasn't a priority. It's time to grow your close rate. Make sure you're on your "A-game" at every step: capturing leads with on-line ads and winning website, capturing great Google reviews, scheduling quote appointments quickly, following-up to close, helping prospects make decisions, etc.

As you know, there are good places and bad places to get leads. In a recent survey of contractor leaders, I heard loud and clear that the worst quality leads come from Facebook ads (too many "shoppers") and those nationally advertised lead services that rhyme with "Evangelist" (they sell those

leads to every lowball guy). Spend your money in places that drive measurable results. Drop me a note if you want my recommendations.

3) Watch Your Costs, NOW

It's getting harder to raise prices to cover for increasing overhead costs. And many organizations got bloated the last several years: extra people in overhead; lack of expense control; saying "let's do it, we can afford it" too many times. Expenses need to stop growing so fast, or they'll eat all of your profits.

Also examine inventory, equipment and other "investments" that may not be generating a return. When interest rates were low, the cost of tying up cash in extra parts or additional equipment was low. Not anymore! Sell down the excess and put the cash to better use. Grab safe interest-bearing yields around 5% by sweeping your company cash into treasury bills. Warren Buffett does it, you can too.

4) Generational Change in the Industry

I helped moderate a discussion group of Texas contractors in February that sorted through the many impacts of changing workforce.

First, participants discussed the challenges of onboarding newer employees and transferring knowledge from those headed toward retirements. Much harder than it seems!

Second, I shared insights on the large number company owners looking to sell, who are often completely unprepared for making a transition and capturing the full value for their business.

Third, the group ruminated on how slowly our industry embraces valuable technology. While the rest of the world debates the impact of AI, our industry underutilizes contractor software (half the companies don't use field service software yet), has customer-unfriendly websites and is slow to offer up remote irrigation system monitoring. If you want to profit from technology, look within your own business.

Jeff Carowitz is a respected advisor to leading landscape industry firms. Connect with him on LinkedIn or at Jeff@StrategicForceMarketing.com.



Latest education and training happenings

by Mike Dwyer, CID, Hot Water Aplenty

It has been a busy month!

February 6, we had a training session with Port Washington and Roslyn Water Districts. The topic of discussion was how to maximize water savings. The goal is to reduce demand on the aquifer that is under this peninsula.

Continued over pumpage of drinking water can cause salt water intrusion. We have talked about smart controllers, rain sensors and nozzle selection for rotors. These are effective ways to reduce demand. We need to start doing things to stop small waste. Install check valves in all irrigation heads. Pressure regulation on sprinkler heads. Lawn areas should separate from shrub beds. Shrubs beds from flower beds. Use drip irrigation in bed areas.

January 1 of 2025 all houses should have a smart controller in these districts. I want to thank Kevin Lewis from Hunter Industries for donating a Hydrowise smart controller as a door prize.

February 14 we did an event with Liberty Water. Art Elmers of Netafim did a class on drip irrigation. This class was targeted to help Liberty clients reduce their water use. Drip is an excellent way to irrigate shrub,

flower or vegetable gardens. The class was registered and attendees received 1 CEU. The class was followed by Rewild who promotes native plantings. We had a trade show after the presentations.

Hunter, Toro, Netafim, Central Irrigation Supply and SiteOne Landscape Supply had tables. Attendees had a chance to see the new products and ask about some that they haven't tried yet. The solution to most of your problems is communicating with your supply house and manufactures rep. Get to know them before you need them.

Mike Dwyer, CIC, is with Hot Water Aplenty. He currently serves on the IANY Board of Directors and leads the IANY Water Conference Committee.

Photos: Liberty Water event was a great success with representatives from Hunter, Toro, Netafim, Central Irrigation Supply and SiteOne Landscape Supply.



Want to improve your business? Get involved!

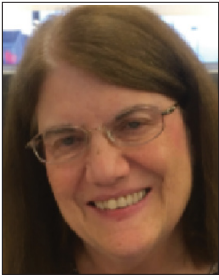
2024 IANY Membership Meeting

March 13 | 6:00 - 8:00 PM

Edgewood Bar and Grill | 511A Commack Rd, Deer Park, NY 11729

Join IANY for an evening of discussion and networking with fellow irrigation contractors. Learn the latest in the irrigation industry and help IANY plan for the coming year.

Visit <https://iany.org/upcoming-events> to learn more.



Your most important marketing tool

by Lorraine Hart, Ideal Consulting Services

I am often asked about websites. These questions range from “should I?”, “must I?”, “should it be fancy?”, “should it be simple?”, “is it cheap?”, “is it expensive?”, “can I live without it?” The answer to all those questions is yes, and it depends. If you haven’t stopped reading by now, you deserve some real answers to those often-asked questions.

In answer to the question “should I?” I am tempted to ask you if you should have a phone or more to the point a cell phone. Why do you need to have a website? Quite simply, because as a business it’s the thing to do and people expect it. That does not mean that you are going to get an influx of new clients simply because you have a website. However, if and when you decide it is time to create or redesign your website you will want to take some steps to make it possible for your company to be found.

One of the simple steps is to include your website in all your other promotional materials. Another step has to do with what is referred to as making your website search engine friendly by including search engine optimization when it is developed.

Practically speaking, what can your website do for you? It serves as a good communication tool, a way to get leads. It gives you the opportunity to brag a little or a lot. It is an opportunity to show off your work, to show how you are different and of course to show that you are up with modern technology. Even if people don’t visit you online, it makes them feel secure that your business has an online presence.

The next question is how it should look? That depends on you and your potential target audience. Your website design should represent your company’s brand. Some people prefer lots of bells and whistles, others prefer simpler. What



Photo: Design your website with visitors and customers in mind. What action are you hoping they will take?

do you like? More importantly, what will your visitors like, or should I say those who you want as potential clients. Your website should be easy to navigate and hold visitors’ attention.

Costs vary greatly and no; quality is not directly proportional to cost. I have seen some very nice, inexpensive websites, but unfortunately, I have also seen some very expensive, really bad websites. Beware of the very high cost and very low-cost solutions. Make sure you know what you are getting so you can compare your options.

Once you decide to have or create a new website you will be glad you did. In addition to a storefront on the web, you will have another way to communicate with your clients.

For more information, contact Ideal Consulting Services/ Websites by Ideal at 516-826-6725.



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I have the following certifications:

Certified Landscape Irrigation Auditor

Certified Irrigation Contractor

Certified Irrigation Designer

Other

IANY membership dues are \$225 and the membership year runs from January to December.

Ways to Pay: PayPal - Click on "Submit Payment" at IANY.org

Mail - Completed form and check payable to "Irrigation Association of New York"

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Renew your 2024 dues

The 2024 year is moving quickly and membership dues had a January 31, 2024, deadline. You should have received your invoice via email and mail. If you haven't already, now is the time to renew!

Contact Noreen Rich (noreenrich@irrigation.org; 703.795.4933,) if you need assistance with your membership renewal.