



## City of Zachary, LA Wins National Award for Radio Transmitted Meter Reading

Apr 30, 2004 - At the Congress of Public Technologists in San Antonio, Texas April 28-30, 2004, the City of Zachary, Louisiana was awarded by Public Technology, Inc. their 2003 Solutions Winner, Small Energy Category for Zachary's entry "Automatic, Radio Transmitted Meter Reading System."

"Our Solutions program, started over 15 years ago, is designed to highlight technology implementations at the local government level aimed at improving governance and service delivery in their jurisdiction. Each year, the Solutions program acknowledges the most innovative jurisdictions both in the United States and internationally," says PTI President Costis Toregas.

The basis for this award was the group effort that Zachary mounted for their cities wide need to improve their city's water and gas metering. Stephen Nunnery, Zachary's Chief Administrator, expresses it this way, "Chris Davezac, our Utilities Director, and myself started about four years ago work on finding replacement meters. We talked with and asked for quotes from some of the largest meter manufacturers including our present supplier, Master Meter. We had a full list of features and benefits for the city that we needed in the new system we were looking for to change out all of our water and gas meters." The list included:

- Automatic Meter Reading System-AMR
- Reduction in meter reading time and manpower
- Highly reliable and accurate meters
- High level of technology advancement
- Compatible meter data transfer to billing process

Both Mr. Davezac and Mr. Nunnery worked long and hard looking at other utility locations, researching new technology advances and with major manufacturers and suppliers to understand their product offerings and advantages. Driven by the fact that Zachary's growth has increased to become the second fastest growth community in the state, they knew that they would have to have a system that could expand rapidly with ease involving no complex technology issues. They had the support of the City Council for what was being proposed for the city's metering, so it was time to move forward with the request for bids and the selection process based on what they needed.

Six thousand DIALOG 3G Wireless RF AMR water meters and three thousand gas meters equipped with AMR compatible radios were purchased for the city wide network from Master Meter, Inc. of Fort Worth, Texas. The water meter has a Wireless RF radio enclosed in the register of the water meter with its antenna. Everything is moisture proof sealed with no external wires, powered by powerful lithium batteries with an average ten year plus life. The meter self starts run after the first cubic foot of water passes through the meter which are pre-programmed at the factory needing no site programming, so they install like a standard water meter.

So it installs like a regular water meter, starts by itself, is read from the utility truck driving down the street and the data is transferred to the billing software that the City of Zachary uses. When the gas meters start to be installed the same truck will be able to receive the read from the street and transfer it to the Zachary billing software.

Zachary utilities are installing all of the meters themselves to help reduce their out of pocket expense. It is a common practice to have the installation work done by a specialty group to install the new system, but Chris Davezac wanted to have his staff do the work for other reasons than just to save the money. If they installed them, they would know how it was installed, they would take the time to make sure other little things were done correctly and completely, so they would not have any problems later and finally they would have the product expertise in their own group. No surprises for the future of the system.

All of the issues that Zachary's program had established are beginning to happen.

The \$1.3M project has a pay out in about four and half years. There are 2600 water meters installed since the project started in mid-October 2003 and they have already noticed a difference in the number of water leaks they have found which helps the resident, as well as the city. The efficiencies that they have shown help the city establish their share of the state funded improvements for Zachary. It's based on water used and since they have new, more accurate water meters to identify water leaks, meter tampering, water backflow then the amount of water use recorded has increased which increases the city's share of the funding. It follows that as the number of new meters are installed the more the water use is recorded and the more of the funding share the city will receive.

With the first series of water meters installed the labor savings is half of the original meter reading time. It took two to three men about a week to read their older water meters. Today they are test reading 1200 meters in 2 1/2 hours. At that pace they will have the same time down to one person completing the task of reading both the water and gas meters in two and half days.

The new unexpected safety features are the weather and dogs have a hard time making a difference in the read time now. The meter reader is in a vehicle and protected from both.

Everyone agrees that the program is going so well because it has selected excellent contributing members to all aspects of the program. Without the support of the Zachary City Council this couldn't have started and been funded. The hard upfront work and continued follow through of Chris Dav-

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ezac as Utilities Director and Stephen H. Nunnery as Chief Administrator has sustained the program. Zachary's Mayor Charlene Smith has been a supporter and advocate from the beginning. Then the work team members who deal with the daily issues and installation are:

- Amanda Castello, Inspections Director
- Jeffery Johnson, Gas & Water Foreman
- Lionel Lawson, Sewer Foreman

One last group has helped put this together and that is Master Meter for their help and support. The key person has been Kurt Ash the Regional Sales Manager for Master Meter who we felt was so valuable that his name appears on the PTI Award with the other Zachary team members.

The use of the new technology is a double win in that the city does get more funding because of the way the data is more accurately collected and the time savings in the collection will reduce by half the actual read time. The combination of the technology, a funding blessing for being more effective and a long-term savings and revenue increase with the utility and municipal team that has made this happen will continue to pay off for the City of Zachary for years to come.

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