

Mike H. Mehmert, Johnson Screens

Water Well Journal decided to catch up with Mike H. Mehmert, a member of the National Ground Water Association and an active Well Standards Committee member. He was the 2010 National Ground Water Research and Educational Foundation (NGWREF) McElhiney Lecturer. NGWREF is operated by the National Ground Water Association as a 501(c)(3) public foundation.

Mehmert is the director of sales and marketing-well products at Johnson Screens, a Weatherford company. His career, spanning more than 38 years, has encompassed consulting, contracting, and manufacturing—almost entirely in the groundwater industry. He was the project director and contributing author for the third edition of *Groundwater & Wells*.

"You Drill a Hole—You Develop a Well" was the title of Mehmert's 2010 NGWREF McElhiney Lecture. The discussion examined what the negative drilling impacts are, what can cause them, what we can do about them, and the consequences when they are not addressed. Various development techniques were presented, with the emphasis on suitability of technique to completion design. Mehmert discussed and attempted to answer the ever-



Mike H. Mehmert, 2010 McElhiney Lecturer

"It's getting people to understand that well development is just as important as drilling the hole."

present question, "When is a well developed?" The lecture addressed both low- and high-capacity well development issues.

Water Well Journal: To recap, how was your lecture received by the groundwater industry?

Mike H. Mehmert: I think it was well received. I met a lot of people, got a lot of good questions, and opened some people's eyes. It was a good topic. I tried to present it from a different perspective.

I tried to get into the why are we doing well development, why do we do it the way we do, and can we do it better. We don't bill for the development of the well. It can go smoothly, but when it goes bad, the framework isn't there. I think it opened up the discussion of this process before it gets to an adversarial aspect.

I tried to take well development and look under the hood: why do we do it, what goes wrong when we do it, how do you address what goes wrong when you do it because it will continue to go wrong (*laughs*). We're only people. We use equipment, and equipment breaks down. People get sidetracked.

WWJ: What are some of the issues you addressed regarding well development?

Mike: Well development is not a line item in a contract. Some people think, "Pump the well until it's clear, now it's developed." No, that's not well develop-

2011 McElhiney Lecturer Hits the Road to Speak About Nebraska's Grout Study

The 2011 McElhiney Lecturer is Tom Christopherson, program manager for Nebraska's Water Well Standards and Contractors' Licensing Program for the Department of Health and Human Services.

The title of the lecture is "The Nebraska Grout Task Force Research: Unexpected Results—New Solutions."

A licensed water well drilling and pump installation contractor, Christopherson has more than 25 years of hands-on field experience, complemented by his 12 years in water regulation enforcement and inspection.

A scientific investigation into well construction practices will help ensure groundwater is safe to drink, thanks to research by government agencies, the Nebraska Well Drillers Association,

the University of Nebraska, industry suppliers of drilling and grout products, and several consultants.



Tom Christopherson, 2011 McElhiney Lecturer

Through NGWREF's McElhiney Lecture Series in Water Well Technology, this research will be shared firsthand with the water well construction community throughout 2011, perhaps leading to jurisdictions beyond Nebraska revising their water well construction codes.

For more information on the 2011 McElhiney Lecturer, visit www.ngwa.org/ngwref/mcellhiney/current.aspx. To see where Christopherson is speaking next, check Coming Events on page 134.

The McElhiney Lecture Series in Water Well Technology is made possible by a grant from Franklin Electric Co.



Mike Price is the associate editor of *Water Well Journal*. In addition to his *WWJ* responsibilities, Price produces NGWA's newsletters and contributes to the Association's quarterly scientific publication. He can be reached at mprice@ngwa.org.

ment. It's about education. We've taught development over the years. Look at our company. We've taught people a lot about well design and well efficiency. We have addressed well development over the years, but to me, not from the aspect of all the issues with well development. We've looked at how does our product benefit well development, not the whole well development process. So in terms of that, I think it's an educational thing; it's getting people to understand that this is just as important as drilling the hole, doing this part of it right. If we don't do this part of it right, you're going to wind up with nothing. Rightfully so, you need to pay for that. You need to understand that's a value.

WWJ: That leads me to my next question on contracts, one of your main talking points during the lecture.

Why isn't well development included as a line item in a contract?

Mike: Development is not as precise as drill to this depth, which is easily measured. It's overlooked because development is vague. Development gets into the art; we can't define that as well as we can measure diameters, depths, flows, etc. That's why a lot of good people brought up coming to grips with techniques or measures or something on-site that we can better use to evaluate where we are with development. I don't have those answers, but can we as an industry come up with techniques or procedures or tools that will allow us to do a better job of site evaluation in real-time so that we can make better decisions? A lot of times on-site decisions need to be made right away, and if you have to wait to get a hold of somebody, that may be an issue.

WWJ: Lastly, how do you think your lecture has benefited the groundwater industry?

Mike: The perception of well development was well received. I heard comments like "interesting, thought-provoking." Will anything come of it? I don't know. I tried to put a different twist on it. I think people agree that it's important. To me as an industry, I do think we focus on screens and those types of things. Companies are in business to make money. We're not in the development business per se, we don't sell services. The only thing we can potentially offer the industry is a better

widget to make development more effective or save time or develop some value to the end user.

A contractor, on the other hand, a lot of times he is under the gun to bid a lump sum for something. To me, one of the things that the industry might consider in more situations is time and materials work, like in the oil field. In our industry it's a lump-sum bid, and I think a lot of that has to do with the buy ability. For contractors to bid, they have to try and assess, to bid on lump sums, assess the risks, and pad that bid in case you have a bad situation.

When structuring contracts, risk, what I see is heavily placed on the contractor, not necessarily the consultant. Not saying that's right or wrong, it's just the way it is. How do you spread that risk around so that the owner winds up with the best value? I think we can do a better job, but you got to address these other facts. That may be a generation away, but it's an educational process. I think what we've learned is that we have the knowledge to do it better, but we have to change the system to allow the knowledge to work best. [WWJ](#)