

Good news travels fast in small towns

Started with donated land from the Willis brothers to the Great Northern Railroad in 1870, the City of Willis, Texas, is located approximately 45 miles north of Houston. The people of Willis are proud of their good schools and churches and pride themselves as a friendly place to raise a family.

Client background

With a little more than 6,000 in population, the City is by most standards a small town. And in a town this size, word travels fast. So, when the City of Conroe, located just 8 miles south of Willis, started experiencing huge utility savings and increased revenue due to its 2005 performance contracting project with Siemens Industry, Inc., the City of Willis was very interested in a similar project to replace their aging water meter system.

Client objectives

As a traditional water meter ages, it becomes inaccurate and unable to record all of the water flowing through it. Essentially, the city ends up paying for much of its citizens' water usage because it prepays the utility company for the usage or water it pumps from wells and does not recuperate the cost via utility billing.

Siemens solutions

Chad Nobles, Account Executive for Siemens Texas branch, was more than happy to share with the City how performance contracting would allow their municipality to use energy savings and increased revenues to pay for the cost of replacing the City's water meters with the most advanced technology available. Brenda Burns, City Secretary, concurs, "Chad played a key role in getting the financing and explaining the project to key city officials so we could get the project up and running."



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As part of its contract with Siemens, the City of Willis replaced more than 2,000 residential and business water meters and installed an advanced water meter system that uses radio waves to provide automatic readings. The project also included replacing broken meter boxes, valves, and curb stops. Each water meter is equipped with a radio antenna that emits a signal that is read by an on-board laptop or hand-held computer. In this way, the meter reader can capture the reading without leaving the city vehicle, which dramatically improves the accuracy and time in which the meters are read.

Client results

In addition to providing precise readings, maintaining accurate history, and leveling the water billing rates, the advanced water meter system has some other advantages. The water department historically experienced a high turnover rate, but the drive-by system reduced the number of employees needed in the department while also making the job much easier and safer. The new system significantly reduces operational costs, including workers' compensation claims. Since the new water meters can be read from a vehicle-mounted laptop, employee injuries are dramatically reduced.

The new system captures accurate figures on water usage to the nearest one-eighth of a gallon so that the City can ensure that customers are appropriately billed. Additionally, the cost of replacing the water meters will be paid for in operational savings and revenues from lost water over the next nine years as part of a Guaranteed Performance Contract procured under Local Government Code 302. The new system is guaranteed by Siemens via a performance assurance agreement to ensure all meters remain accurate thereby producing the increased revenue and reducing operational costs. This agreement randomly tests and monitors the system improvements to verify its continued accuracy and efficiency.

The total contract for a little over \$1 million guarantees an annual savings of \$45,384 and estimated increased revenues at \$252,283 per year over nine years. The City of Willis may be a small town, but it now boasts the most advanced technology available in water meter reading. Burns is pleased with Siemens and adds, "Everything is happening as it should and works without problems."

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