

# CLARIFIER

A P U B L I C A T I O N O F G U L F C O A S T A U T H O R I T Y



FALL 2020

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## GCA CHAIRMAN'S LETTER

Well, 2020 has been an interesting year.

I am so proud to be associated with GCA's all-star team and the phenomenal job they are doing in navigating through the pandemic. Their professionalism, dedication and continuing commitment to our mission, even in the face of these unprecedented challenges, is truly commendable. Across the board – from senior management to the operators doing the heavy lifting in the plants – all have risen valiantly to the challenge, continuing GCA's essential work while protecting themselves and each other. My heartfelt thanks to all. While we still have a long way to go to get to the other side of the virus and its wide-ranging impacts, I am confident we will continue to deliver for our customers, the environment and our communities.

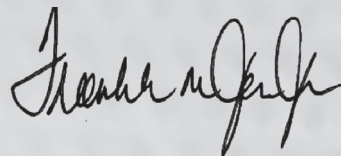
We also face a changing of the guard at the top. In mid-November, CEO Lori Traweek will retire and hand the reins to Liz Fazio Hale, current Assistant General Manager. Please join me in thanking Lori for her commitment and the significant contributions she has made to GCA during her 27 years here. She has been an incredibly valuable asset and we will miss her greatly, but wish her well in her retirement.

At the same time, we extend our congratulations to Liz. Since Lori recruited her to GCA a year and a half ago, she has proven to be a driving force to move the organization forward. We are looking forward to her leadership in the years ahead.

Despite all these changes, the team has continued to relentlessly focus on delivering on our mission of more than 50 years. Over the summer, the board approved a minor update to that mission that better captures our focus as we begin our second half century. Our mission statement now reads (with new language bolded):

*Protecting the waters of the State of Texas through environmentally sound, economically feasible **and technologically advanced** wastewater **and water** management practices.*

What vital and inspiring work! Thanks to our entire team, our customers, our affiliates and our communities that are helping us deliver on that commitment.



Franklin D.R. Jones, Jr.





## GCA CEO'S LETTER

### What a bittersweet moment.

For 27 years, I have worked to advance the mission of Gulf Coast Authority and protect the waters of the state of Texas. It has been a rewarding journey. Through the years, I've achieved career success in an organization that makes a positive difference to the environment and to the communities where we operate.

Over those years, there have been a slew of challenges and milestone achievements: From growing the footprint of our operations to advancing our technological capacity, from working with our amazing customers to connecting with economic development and conservation organizations.

But what stands out most for me is the people at GCA. I have been blessed to have worked with such an amazing team: Smart, dedicated professionals – many of whom have become personal friends as well as cherished colleagues.

And while I have always been extremely proud of our team, the pandemic underscored how truly outstanding the people of GCA are. Their ability and willingness to step up and work through the uncertainty and challenges of those early days and their ongoing commitment to following our new health protocols, both at work and at home, have made all the difference. We have continued our essential work – even in the face of hurricane and tropical storm threats – without missing a beat and still keeping each other safe.

As excited as I am to dive into my post-retirement plans – more time with my already-retired husband, kids and grandkids, and (eventually) travel – I will so miss my work family. Of course, knowing that Liz Fazio Hale is ready to take over my role makes leaving much easier.

When I first recruited Liz to the team as part of succession planning, I knew she was good. Working with her since has shown she is outstanding. I'll be leaving GCA in smart and capable hands.

So in mid-November, I'll bid GCA *au revoir* – but only good-bye until we meet again. In addition to continuing my work on the boards of the Galveston Bay Foundation, Texas Conservation Fund and the Texas Water Trade, my sincere hope is that we will stay in touch.

My heartfelt thanks to all who have made this such a rewarding journey.



**Lori Traweck**



# Managing Through COVID-19

**Back in March, the world turned upside down. News that a mysterious and deadly respiratory virus had invaded the U.S. and was spreading quickly upended most aspects of normal life.**

At Gulf Coast Authority, our work is considered essential. How could we continue to meet our customer needs and protect the environment while keeping everyone safe? The leadership team went to work.

“While we did have a pandemic plan,” explained CEO Lori Traweck, “this coronavirus situation was beyond what we had originally contemplated. And, particularly in those early days, there was so much we didn’t know and the official guidance kept shifting.

“I can’t commend enough our leadership team and our employees across the board,” she added. “I am so grateful for all their hard work and it humbles me when I think about what an amazing job everyone has done in pulling together and continuing to perform above and beyond.”

To craft a plan, Traweck along with senior managers Liz Fazio Hale, Scott Harris and Gordon Pederson as well as directors Keith Hardcastle and Brad Peck first focused on understanding the evolving guidance from the Centers for Disease Control and the World Health Organization and translating those into new policies and procedures.

“Our overarching goal was to protect our employees’ health while continuing services uninterrupted,” Liz Fazio Hale, Assistant General Manager, said. “This was a delicate balance, but we moved swiftly to implement protective procedures that ensured our employees’ safety and secured our operations.”

“Like almost everyone, we faced a steep learning curve,” said Chief Operating Officer Scott Harris. “The toughest part was that it was a moving target, given all the uncertainty surrounding the virus and appropriate safety measures. We were changing and adapting almost weekly in those first months. And we are still continuing to evolve as appropriate as scientists learn more and government officials update guidance.”

“Most importantly,” Human Resources Director Keith Hardcastle stressed, “while there have been exposures and some positive tests in the past seven months, all came from outside. Thanks to the cooperation and vigilance of our employees, we’ve had no workplace infections at GCA. I can’t say enough about how wonderful our people are given the adjustments we’ve had to make – many proactively – from all across the Authority.”

## Early planning

This success started with the team quickly creating or revising a range of policies and procedures, including cleaning protocols, visitor policies, temperature testing, social distancing, mask wearing, business travel restrictions and personal hygiene, among others.

“We were fortunate to get in early and start working the issue from the get-go,” Hardcastle recalled. “I was a case in point, having to self-quarantine for 14 days in mid-March after returning from Disney World.”

“Tremendous credit goes to the purchasing and procurement teams who jumped into action to find sufficient PPE,” said Fazio Hale. “Every cog in the wheel had to be working perfectly.”

## Moving to virtual

An early decision was to move as much of the work as possible online and have those employees who could, work from home. This meant technology became another sourcing challenge.

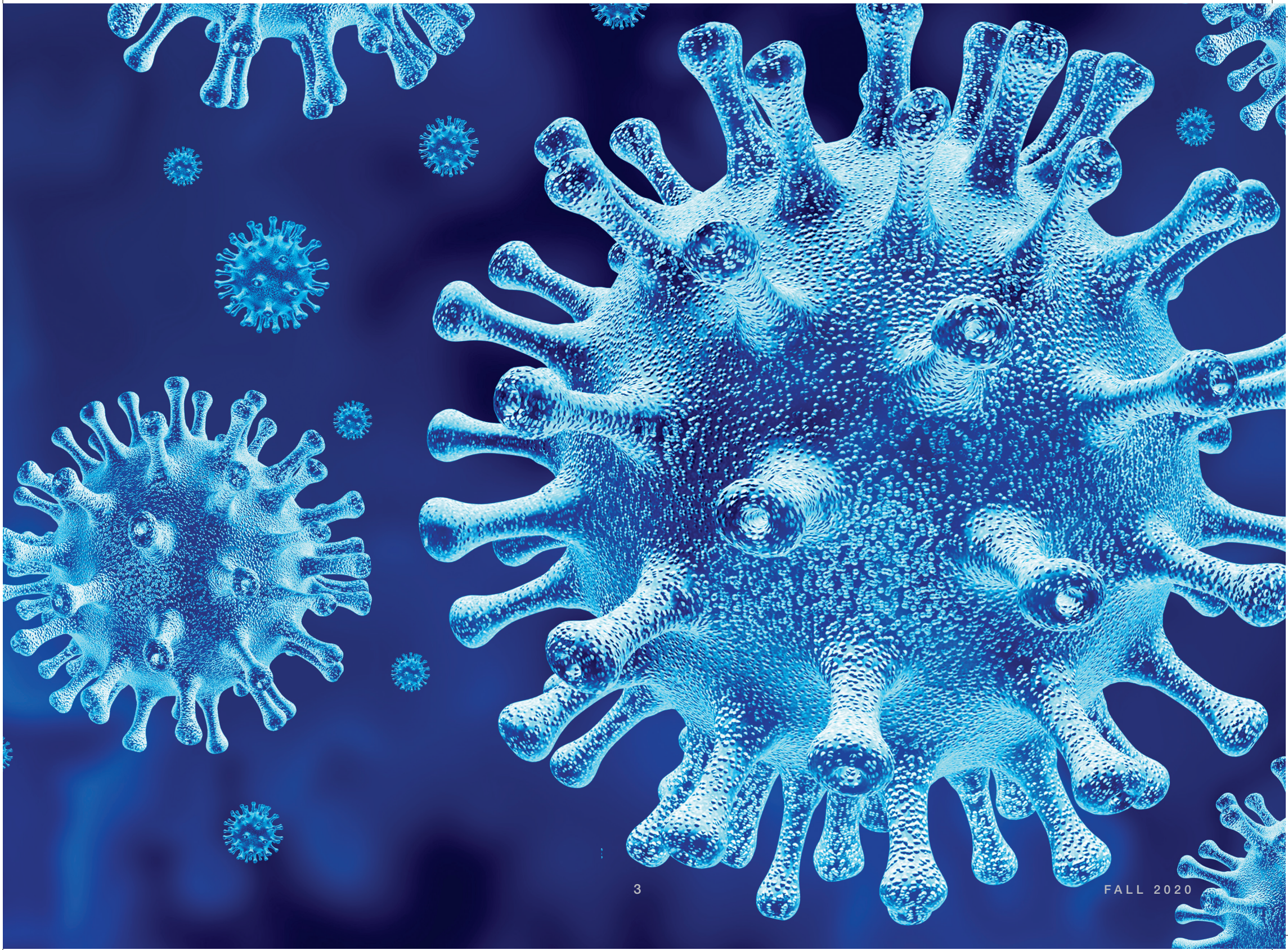
The IT department sprang into action to obtain enough software licenses, laptops and other hardware as well as reliable network services and security to support the virtual work.

“Technically, we had to jump through hoops,” said Chief Technical Officer Gordon Pederson. “The team went to work revamping surplus laptops and wrangling what we needed in terms of licensing, extra bandwidth and virtual private network conduits from suppliers – all of whom were dealing with unprecedented demand and inventory challenges. By end of March, we were up and running.”

Pederson also said there was a great need for training, noting that while they had introduced Microsoft Teams in 2019 at all the facilities, only Central Lab had fully adopted it before the pandemic hit.









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“The IT team was amazing. A silver lining is how much better we have all gotten across the board on using technology,” Fazio Hale said. “It will serve us well going forward, even after the pandemic is over.”

### Keeping safe at the plants

Plant employees on the front lines, however, cannot do their vital work remotely. In addition to the human cost of contracting the virus, too many employees becoming infected or having to quarantine because of potential exposure at one time would pose real operational challenges.

GCA uses CDC guidelines as a reference for its testing protocols. If exposed, employees quarantine for seven days and then test after the fifth day. If the test is negative, they can return to work. If positive, they are required to quarantine for another 10 days without symptoms. A seven-day quarantine is also required for employees who travel by air or upon returning from a hot spot and tested as mentioned above.

“The air travel restrictions have meant a lot of driving back and forth from Houston to our Odessa facility!” Pederson said.

The management team also understood the need to deal with the different perspectives and personal situations of individual employees.

“Confusion in early messaging from authorities added to the challenge as some employees were hearing that it wasn’t any worse than the flu or it was not a real threat,” Hardcastle noted.

Individual situations also differed. Some employees had young children with the challenge of online schooling and limited day care. Others were concerned about elderly parents or had preexisting conditions themselves that put them more at risk.

“COVID-19 is a highly contagious infectious disease,” said Safety Director Brad Peck. “GCA has been fortunate so far because we’ve not had any spread within our organization. I’d like to think that it’s because of the hard work and leadership from our talented management team. But it’s not over. We’ll be watching, and waiting...and we’ll be ready to respond to any further developments.”

*“So much of our culture is based on human interaction – our communications structure, procedures and so on. It was engrained in us,” Harris said. “To take just one example, meetings. We were so used to doing face-to-face meetings. While it took us a while to work out the kinks given the quick shift to doing everything virtually, we’ve overcome it and are sitting in a good position. It is a real testament to our employees that we were able to maintain normal operations throughout.”*

### Serving customers

Next in priority to employee safety for the GCA team is continuing to supply industrial and municipal wastewater treatment for our customers, recognizing customers also have been working through pandemic impacts on their operations.

“For many of our industrial customers, it was a double whammy with the price of oil dropping at same time as the pandemic,” said Fazio Hale. “Some of our facilities were impacted more than others in terms of revenue, but not so significantly as to affect our services, thankfully.”

“The pandemic upped the need to stay closely connected to our customers and affiliates, particularly as we were all trying to sort through it in the early days,” Pederson said. “And all the interactions had to move online, of course. But after a few small bumps in the road early on, it has been essentially seamless.”

“It is a point of pride for us that our operations continued to operate reliably through all this,” said Traweek, “and a real testament to the caliber and commitment of our team.”

### Dealing with hurricane season

Facing the most active hurricane season in decades – or maybe ever – GCA quickly adapted its storm plans to accommodate pandemic-imposed restrictions.

“We re-thought some of our plans, for instance adding masks to our response kits and changing to one person in a room for evacuation accommodations,” Traweek said. “Most of our facilities are along the coast and well versed in storm preparation.”

“All storms are different – for example, Ike with its winds and storm surge vs Harvey’s relentless rain and widespread flooding – so we have to be adaptable in our planning and response,” said Harris. “While COVID added a new layer of complexity, our folks took it in stride.”

### FACILITIES ADAPT TO NEW WORLD

GCA’s coronavirus policies and procedures provided a framework for each of its facilities to finetune operations and adapt as needed to its particular circumstances while continuing to serve customers.

### Central Laboratory

“Initially, no one expected the pandemic to last this long,” Doris Haydon, Lab Manager, said.

Haydon reported that no visitors were allowed in the lab in the early days – samples had to be left at the door. As the pandemic continues, visitor protocols remain strict, but the lab has instituted new procedures for maintenance and repair vendors at the facility. Outside firms are limited to one per week – or two if a critical piece of equipment is involved.





# TRASH BASH SHIRTS GAIN NEW LIFE



**One victim of the pandemic was Trash Bash® 2020.**

GCA has long been a major sponsor of the annual effort to clean up beaches along Galveston Bay. Originally scheduled for March 28, the event was canceled as the pandemic made its presence known in the Houston area, leaving the Texas Conservation Fund (TCF) with 4,000 t-shirts it had ordered for participants in the event. Our CEO, Lori Traweek also serves as President of TCF, the organization that manages River, Lakes, Bays 'N Bayous Trash Bash®.

Lori reached out to Executive Assistant and TCF Treasurer Lynda Norton and GCA Facility Manager and Trash Bash site coordinator Phyllis Frank to figure out how best to put these shirts to good use. After working the phones, the team arranged donations to Shriners Hospital's burn unit in Galveston, Texas Children's Hospital and homeless ministries including Lords of the Streets (or LOTS), The Bridge, Mercy Tree and others. With laundry facilities closed or more difficult to access in the pandemic, the shirts came in particularly handy for those living on the streets. Phyllis Frank at Washburn Tunnel also put her crafting skills to the test, turning some shirts into masks.

*GCA delivered 1000+ t-shirts from the canceled Trash Bash event to worthy causes, including Shriners Hospital for Children (above) and homeless shelters Lord of the Streets and Mercy Tree (right), with LOTS Executive Director Steve Capper shown gladly accepting them. The final photo depicts the shirts cleverly turned into masks.*



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“Authority protocols have worked well for us,” Haydon said. “Our team wears masks, with temperature checks daily and strict return-to-work procedures after being off.”

Other adaptations included removing some chairs from the lunchroom to reinforce social distancing and the addition of new disinfection procedures.

Haydon reports that the biggest change was in shift schedules. Typically, lab employees work Sunday to Wednesday or Wednesday to Saturday, with Wednesday the overlap day reserved for training and team meetings. However, having everyone in the office one day a week made appropriate social distancing more of a challenge. The lab has restructured the workflow and now encourages team members to alternate on Wednesday.

“This has been a learning experience for everyone,” Haydon said. “We have a fairly young staff driving the need for extensive team interaction and ongoing training. With our mix of talented, experienced chemists combined with bright young minds and fresh ideas, we’ve continued to deliver.”

### **Bayport Industrial Wastewater Treatment Facility**

“We certainly experienced new complications and challenges to our adaptive management in March 2020

with new guidelines, lockdowns, reopenings – it was a bit of a moving target,” said Kim Ontiveros, Facility Manager. “We dealt with it by trying to be open, honest and transparent about the changes with employees.”

She reports that while adjusting to operating in a pandemic was very time consuming, especially on the front end, “we are working through it as a team,” she said.

Adding to the complexities at the Bayport facility is an ongoing expansion project (see page 9) as well as several smaller construction projects on site. This has increased the number of personnel at the facility at any one time with workers from multiple contractors, making coordination and social distancing a greater challenge.



“While our workload didn’t change, how we do business certainly has,” Ontiveros said. “Even our monthly CAP (public engagement) meetings have gone virtual.” Bayport saw lower loading and volumes initially, along with temporary shutdowns among smaller customers, but average throughput is now back to normal. Hurricane season and the threats from Laura and Tropical Storm Beta added to the “fun,” Ontiveros said.

“Our hurricane plan held strong although I’d prefer it without the weight of the pandemic on our shoulders,” she added. “We did put extra thought into it – for example,

adding masks and other COVID supplies into first responder evacuation kits. A lot of our customers take these storms seriously so support from them actually aids in our response efforts. It was a good dry run,” she noted.

### **Blackhawk Regional Wastewater Treatment Facility**

Blackhawk is both GCA’s smallest facility with a staff of only eight and unique among the Authority operations in that it only accepts municipal, rather than industrial, wastewater.

“The pandemic has been difficult as I’ve personally had to quarantine several times due to travel or potential exposures,” said Facility Manager Shannon Miftari, who was promoted to that position in June. “I enjoy the freedom of working from home, but some tasks just have to be done on-site.”

He is proud to report no COVID-19 cases at the facility. “To this point, we have been safe here,” he boasted. “The GCA policies and procedures have really worked well for us.”

Miftari noted that the facility made pandemic-related changes to operational procedures, including backing off the daily raw influent testing previously conducted for operational data. In addition, operators no longer climb on top of the tanks without first turning off the aerators.

“As a community service, we were excited to be part of a COVID-19 research project with Texas A&M,” he said. ►

### **40-Acre Industrial Wastewater Treatment Facility & Campbell Bayou Solid Waste Management Facility**

“Our Texas City operations are fairly small, with staff pretty spread out,” Diane Maloy, Facility Manager, said, “so it makes social distancing easier.”

She reports that those employees who could began working from home in early March.





# TRACKING THE VIRUS

GCA's Blackhawk Regional Wastewater Treatment Facility has done its part in helping unravel some of the mysteries surrounding COVID-19 and its spread within the community.

Shankar Chellam, professor of environmental engineering at Texas A&M, worked with Brianna Morales, then facility manager, to organize a sampling program. The goal is to detect the presence of the virus' RNA in both the wastewater stream – and unique to other similar studies across the country – from air samples his team took over the collection basins.

"The presence of the coronavirus' RNA can be very informative," Chellam said.

The sampling program ran from mid-April to early August.

"Environmental surveillance gives us clues on what's going on in a community," explains Chellam. "By analyzing wastewater for chemicals and microbiologicals we can learn about disease prevalence, drug use – both illicit and prescribed – and even what people cook or use to wash their clothes."

The Centers for Disease Control has committed to analyzing the samples using its sophisticated testing capabilities. The results should shed light on community exposure to the virus – including asymptomatic individuals. Combining these insights with similar studies

in other geographies will give health experts a better view of the virus prevalence.

Blackhawk provides wastewater treatment to the city of Friendswood, Harris County Municipal District 55, Baybrook Municipal Utility District 1 and the extreme southern portion of Houston.

"Several water utilities have announced similar wastewater sampling programs, but we were proud to be the first in the area," said Shannon Miftari, who took over as Blackhawk facility manager in June. "It is satisfying for all of us at Blackhawk to be part of something positive in addressing the pandemic and the health of our communities."





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“Operators are in the facility all day, every day,” Maloy said, “so after six weeks or so, I started coming back into the office. We still social distance and follow all pandemic plan requirements, but it underscores we are all in this together.”

Luckily, she reports, while there have been a few cases of possible exposures, no one has been positive for the virus. Given the lean staff, any disease spread could pose a real challenge to normal operations.

“Our jobs are very specific and require a lot of expertise,” she said. “Fortunately, we had started cross-training folks pre-pandemic so they can step into other roles if needed. That has been a blessing. We had two instances of folks having to quarantine and it didn’t impact our ability to operate.”

“With all our meetings virtual, I have given up wearing make-up below my eyes,” she laughed. “I try to look at the glass as half full! But seriously, our group out here is so seasoned. They understand the virus is serious and take all the necessary precautions so they don’t bring it to work.”

### **Odessa South Industrial Wastewater Treatment Facility**

“The Panhandle has been hit hard economically by the steep drop in energy prices made worse by the pandemic,” said Charles “Choc” Harris, Facility Manager.

While most of the Odessa facility flows come from the city of Odessa and piped-in industrial users, a portion of the flow comes from trucked-in waste from portable toilets serving oil rigs and other energy operations across a 21-county region. Earlier this year, these flows dropped by more than two-thirds.

“It has certainly limited our new business development,” Harris said. “Nevertheless, morale among the team remains high, particularly as area case counts of the virus continue to come down.”

“We are a small, close-knit group here, with many seasoned employees; everyone has been committed to adhering to safety protocols,” he said. “It’s a good place to work – never boring!”

### **Washburn Tunnel Wastewater Treatment Facility & Vince Bayou Receiving Station**

“Most of our staff can’t work from home,” explained Phyllis Frank, Facility Manager, “but the GCA pandemic response policies and procedures have served us well.”



Changes have included enhanced cleaning, changing office set-ups to support social distancing, rethinking interactions and moving daily operational meetings to virtual platforms.

“We take any necessary face-to-face discussions outside where we can,” she said.

The team also has made changes to the life-critical permitting procedures, adjusting the processes to minimize indoor interactions in the control room.

Culturally, Frank says, the pandemic-mandated changes have been a challenge. “We like to visit with our coworkers and celebrate birthdays, retirements and group achievements together. We’ve gotten creative – holding parades to honor SCRIPT (GCA core values)

winners and hosting virtual celebrations. However, it’s not quite the same.

“I like to brag on our team,” she added. “This has been adaptive management on steroids and they have done such an amazing job rising to the challenge and working through it. Our next challenge is to sustain it – this is a different way of working. Touch-point cleaning and mask wearing are easier to maintain than the social distancing aspect. But everyone is committed.”

### **Looking ahead**

“Currently we have no COVID cases, knock on wood,” said Hardcastle. “It is a tribute to our people that we haven’t missed a step despite hurricanes, despite tropical storms, despite COVID, despite school starts and stops. It has been business as usual – well, make that business as unusual! Our folks have certainly risen to the top.”

“The challenge continues as we go into fall flu season and colder temperatures,” said Scott Harris. “We will continue to monitor data closely. When numbers go down, it is human nature to relax precautions. We stress keeping up the focus in our weekly manager meetings and, so far, everyone has been incredibly attentive and vigilant.”

“We know the pandemic has been hard on all of us in so many ways, but the GCA folks have been amazing. Our message to the team is that this isn’t the first crisis we’ve faced, just the first like this,” Fazio Hale said. “If we keep holding the course, this too will pass.”

“Well, it has been quite a year!” Traweek noted. “I couldn’t be prouder of the job our people have done. What we do here is so vital – protecting our waters is deeply important to all of us. And the team has risen magnificently to the challenge of meeting that goal while keeping each other safe. No one could ask for a better group of people to work with.”





## BAYPORT ORGANIC CAPACITY UPGRADE PROJECT HIGHLIGHTED AT TACWA MEETING

GCA's Bayport Industrial Wastewater Treatment Facility is in the midst of an expansion to support preventative maintenance needs on the existing equipment and prepare for growth in the Bayport Industrial Complex. The approximately \$34 million project includes adding a fifth First Step Aeration Tank, modifications to Ponds 2 and 4, a new overflow line for the Main Lift Station and substantial changes to a motor control center. Start-up is anticipated in first quarter 2021.

Jonte' Greer, Assistant Director - General Engineering, and Jonathan Sandhu, Assistant Director - Technical Services, provided an overview of the project at the July Virtual Texas Association of Clean Water Agencies (TACWA) meeting. The

presentation, "When Complicated Projects become More Complicated – A Facility Siting Adventure," covered the Bayport Organic Capacity Upgrades Project from Stage 1 through its current construction status. They also discussed the challenges faced and how Bayport Operations, GCA Technical Services and GCA's consultants came together to find creative solutions. The presentation slides are available at [www.tacwa.org/event/tacwa-meeting-6](http://www.tacwa.org/event/tacwa-meeting-6).

"This has been a difficult expansion project," said Kim Ontiveros, Facility Manager, "even without pandemic concerns adding another layer of complexity. We face new challenges daily, but we have continued to operate at full capacity for our more than 75 customers. I am so proud of how the team has worked together to tackle issues as they arise while keeping everyone safe."







# Building a Legacy:

**In November, Gulf Coast Authority's CEO will retire, handing over the reins to current Assistant General Manager Liz Fazio Hale.**

Over the past 27 years, Lori has seen many changes at the Authority and has been instrumental in shaping its success. She joined GCA as compliance coordinator in 1993 and was promoted to Manager of Special Projects in 1995 with responsibility for Special Projects and Central Lab. In 1999, she was promoted to Manager of Industrial Operations, overseeing all industrial facilities and the lab. She spent 2012 as Manager of General Services before being promoted to Manager of Operations. In 2016, Lori became Assistant General Manager and then CEO in 2017.

As she prepares to start the next chapter of her life, Lori reflects back on her GCA career.

## **How did you first come to work for GCA?**

In 1992, I moved from Louisiana to Texas to serve as the regional manager for Bioaquatic Testing, a biomonitoring lab based in the Dallas area. The company had hired me to study the feasibility of opening a lab in the Houston area. I first got to know GCA through Gordon Pederson, now our Chief Technical Officer, as one of our clients at the time. Gordon coordinated the testing for GCA's Blackhawk facility and spoke very highly of GCA. I was blown away by GCA's mission and what they had accomplished. When a regulatory compliance position opened up here in 1993, I applied for it and have been here ever since.

My first responsibilities were as a compliance coordinator for GCA's municipal program and at GCA's Campbell Bayou landfill facility. Soon after, I began doing special projects in the community with Gordon. We had so much fun. Projects included sludge composting with the city of Huntsville and Scott's, the fertilizer and soil amendment company; sludge application at a day lily farm north of Houston; a yard waste composting demonstration project with League City; a grant for the first classroom and native garden demonstration at Sheldon Lake State Park; junior composting curricula in area schools; and assistance coordinating the River, Lakes, Bays 'N Bayous Trash Bash®.

## **Why did you want to work here originally? Why stay for 27 years? What makes GCA a special place?**

As I said earlier, I learned a lot about GCA when I was with Bioaquatic Testing and was very impressed by GCA's mission, accomplishments and how happy and professional its employees were. And was I right! Our culture is very supportive and encourages employee



# Lori Traweek Prepares to Say Goodbye

development and a commitment to family. Not only to our own families, but also to our co-workers. We truly care about each other and our mission to protect the waters of Texas – what cooler mission is there? That's why people stay here so long. I've been here 27 years and many others have surpassed 40 years of service because we are fully invested in making each other and GCA a success.

## **What factors contributed to your success?**

The main factor has to be the support and constructive feedback I have received from my peers and leadership over the years. I truly appreciate their input to help me grow professionally. GCA has a very strong collaborative culture rooted in our mission and our core values of stewardship, communication, reliability, integrity, planning and teamwork. Throughout my career here, I've always felt empowered to seek innovation and think outside of the box to find solutions. That led to creativity and a real sense of teamwork and investment in our collective success.

## **What do you consider your key accomplishments?**

I am most proud of the strides GCA has made in diversity. When I started back in 1993, no females or minorities held leadership positions. I became GCA's first female senior manager in 1995 and, fast forwarding to today, my successor Liz and four out of our six facility managers are female, including one Black. There is also increased diversity throughout our ranks. We have developed a robust succession plan over the years and work hard to develop our employees and actively try to promote from within. When that is not possible, we bring talent in from the outside. Hiring or promoting the best candidate for each position, whatever their race or gender, and then providing them the support they need to grow professionally has served us very well.

## **Thinking about GCA and its mission, what are you proudest of?**

GCA's continued success is a testament to the strong reputation our employees have built by their commitment and dedication, day in and day out, to safe, reliable and compliant services. I am proud that we continue to be a reliable resource to industry and municipalities, and actively work to promote economic development in Texas through our services. We have continued to build on GCA's now 51-year commitment to protecting the waters of Texas. From the time GCA was created by the Texas Legislature back in 1969 – a visionary effort promoted by a few Texans who understood the value of clean water – we have played a key role in fulfilling that vision and in expanding societal understanding of and support for clean water and a thriving state. We continually strive to remain relevant by expanding our services

to meet the changing needs of industry, including the ability to provide industrial water solutions that do not compete with potential potable water sources.

## **What are your hopes for the future of GCA? What are the challenges?**

I see GCA continuing work to expand our existing facilities and add new wastewater treatment facilities in areas we do not currently serve. I also see GCA providing critical support in the industrial water space, including produced water recycling and other innovative solutions to provide sustainable water sources that support growth. We are helping tackle the biggest challenges in the produced water arena: The development of cost-effective water treatment technologies and regulatory reform.

## **What advice would you give to someone just starting a career at GCA or in the wastewater industry?**

Think big! There are vast opportunities in this field and at GCA. Effective wastewater treatment produces clean water – something everyone needs, including the environment. There are many opportunities for innovation that can make treatment more efficient, economical and accessible, especially to those in need. GCA's focus on teamwork to achieve and advance our mission provides a fertile atmosphere for creativity and personal growth. That is what I am going to miss the most, along with our extraordinary staff.

## **What do you plan for your retirement?**

I am looking forward to spending more time with my husband, Don, who retired two years ago, and our eight grandchildren who luckily all live in the Houston area. They are my biggest blessings.

I will stay engaged in the water world by continuing to participate on three nonprofit boards. I currently serve as chair of the Galveston Bay Foundation, which is near and dear to my heart because of the good work GBF does to preserve and enhance the bays; am president of the Texas Conservation Fund which manages the annual River, Lakes, Bays 'N Bayous Trash Bash; and am a new board member of Texas Water Trade, an organization committed to harnessing the power of market-based transactions and innovative technologies to achieve long-lasting water supplies for all Texans – a lofty and much needed goal.

In addition, we have a small ranch in South Texas which always needs mowing, and a boat we keep in Florida that keeps us connected to the water. I also hope to get more time to scuba dive, travel and go the gym. Throw a little relaxation in there and that about does it.



## INCOMING CEO REFLECTS ON LORI TRAWEEK'S LEGACY

*Lori Traweek recruited Liz Fazio Hale to the Gulf Coast Authority as Assistant General Manager in 2018 with the intent that Fazio Hale would succeed her as CEO. Fazio Hale brings an extensive background in legal, legislative and financial matters related to water and wastewater management. With Traweek's retirement date approaching, Fazio Hale reflects on GCA and Traweek's leadership.*

"Gulf Coast Authority has been such an exciting new challenge for me, letting me harness all of the skills and experience of my past roles in service to such a vital mission.

Lori has been wonderful as a colleague in the water world as well as at GCA. She is genuinely one of the most entertaining individuals that I have ever met. Combining her outgoing personality with a passion for the environment and her attention to detail created a dynamic leader in Lori. In her 27 years at GCA, she was instrumental in developing a framework of policies and procedures that guide the Authority's work while preserving a family-like culture. Her tenacity made her and the Authority greatly successful in a fast-paced, changing environment. This came to the forefront in GCA's detailed, quick response to the current pandemic. Under Lori's guidance, GCA rose to the occasion to support our employees and our mission to protect the waters of the state of Texas.

Lori will also be remembered for growing GCA's involvement with our communities, industry and economic development, and environmental organizations. I am so pleased she will continue this work even after retirement.

I look forward to continuing the legacy of GCA's mission well into the future, honoring Lori's long career at the Authority and building upon her leadership, the leadership of previous general managers, and the strength of our GCA Board of Directors and employees to do work that is essential to supporting our customers. I wish Lori all the best and look forward to continuing our friendship."





# TRAWEEK'S CO-WORKERS CELEBRATE HER LEADERSHIP



## **Phyllis Frank, Facility Manager, Washburn Tunnel Wastewater Treatment Facility**

"I've known Lori since her early days here and watched her develop into the leader she is today. It has been a real pleasure to work with her, and I wish her the best as she starts the next chapter of her life."

## **Doris Haydon, Manager, Central Laboratory**

"I first met Lori when she joined GCA, but we didn't work closely together until later. She has helped guide the organization through many changes over the years and now really stepped up to the plate with the major challenge of the pandemic. It wasn't until I became the lab manager that I realized how important her role is in the success of GCA. She is very good at her job and I will miss her."

## **Keith Hardcastle, Director of Human Resources & Public Information Officer**

"Lori has been a true pioneer. She's been a trailblazer here at GCA as the first woman in operations and as general manager. Lori is a champion in many regards. She listens well, understands well, seeks and delivers clarity, and is never afraid to act. She is a special person and a great mentor and boss. I can't say enough good about the lady. I will remember the times she has been there for me and me for her. There's never a dull moment with Lori around – I'm going to miss her."

## **Choc Harris, Facility Manager, Odessa South Wastewater Treatment Facility**

"Lori is a good leader, a good thoughtful person who is devoted to GCA and its employees. She has helped make GCA a family and it is all of us working together that makes us so efficient and encourages employee longevity. Plus, she's fun to work with! I'll miss her."

## **Scott Harris, Chief Operating Officer**

"Lori took a chance on me: Hiring me and investing in me and helping guide my career. I admire her leadership and her perseverance. There is a plaque in her office that captures her philosophy perfectly. It says, 'Well-Behaved Women Seldom Make History.' Now, I'm not saying Lori isn't polite! But she has certainly made history, successfully challenging paradigms throughout her 27 years here."

## **Leonard Levine, Technical Services Director**

"Lori is very focused on the details, very precise and organized. She helped develop the Central Lab to what it is today. But her primary legacy will be outreach – building relationships with community and environmental groups and economic development organizations to take GCA's mission beyond the facilities."

## **Diane Maloy, Facility Manager, 40-Acre Industrial Wastewater Treatment Facility**

"My first impression of Lori was that she was someone I'd like to know. After watching her as a leader, I knew she was someone I'd like to mentor me. And she did. Over the years, she also became a good friend. I value her work ethic, concern for others and treating everyone with respect. I've tried to emulate her as much as I can."

## **Shannon Miftari, Facility Manager, Blackhawk Regional Wastewater Treatment Facility**

"Lori is such a charismatic and positive leader. She is very driven. She is one of those people you want to work with – she gets things done, but she cares."

## **Kim Ontiveros, Facility Manager, Bayport Industrial Wastewater Treatment Facility**

"Lori has demonstrated a passion for sharing the vision of GCA. She has advocated for the organization and our mission with agencies and throughout our communities. This passion resonates in her personal life as well, with her leadership and dedication to activities like Trash Bash®. It is very impressive how much she knows about GCA's history and its impact on the environment."

## **Gordon Pederson, Chief Technical Officer**

"I was involved in hiring Lori. She's smart and resourceful with a good work ethic. Her biggest impact has been to how we manage regulatory compliance. Everything we're doing today, she set up when she was working in that area. She revamped our approach, adding detailed procedures, policies and methods. She took us from reactive to proactive, and we are now on the front end of issues and regulatory changes, both federal and state."





# STUDENTS TOUR BLACKHAWK

The Blackhawk facility hosted approximately 50 students in the 7th and 8th grades from Clear Creek ISD's environmental education class in October 2019. The facility's management team, Brianna Morales and Shannon Miftari, were joined by GCA's Phyllis Frank, Gordon Pederson and Denise Ehrlich in providing students with a guided tour and explanation of the wastewater treatment process.

"We all had a great time," Miftari said, "and the students very kindly sent us a thank-you poster with some funny commentary!"





# Blackhawk Regional Wastewater Treatment

Dear Mr. Gordon,

Thank you for showing us all around the wastewater treatment plant. It was interesting how you put it and how you told us at a fast pace. Although, it was nasty you made me feel tough and just suck it in.

- Sincerely,  
Tashon Vu

I learned that all the water we use and the waste water that, are in the sewers go into a facility which takes out all the yucky stuff in the water which gets cleaned.

At the wastewater treatment facility, I learned that the micro-organisms is what cleans the water. Also that aeration tank adds a lot of oxygen so if someone falls in, they will sink to the bottom.

## Field Trip Info

At the wastewater treatment, I learned what would happen if any disaster happened. Basically, almost any natural disaster could cause a power outage, like a flood or hurricane that could mess up the water cleaning and damage.

Dear Brianna,

Thank you for letting us know how a wastewater plant works. I appreciate you taking your time speaking to us.

- Jatin

Thank You!

For showing me how to fix my tire and get me that milk.

PHILIP

Jayden Hernandez

Thank you Shannon for being our tour guide for the wastewater treatment. The tour was really fun and I think you were the best tour guide out of everyone.

Thank You

What I've learned during the trip is that, the water from the restroom at home it goes to the waste water place and they filter it and it goes back to the sinks.

You helped me out a lot.

Thank you all at the wastewater treatment and the people at the tree nursery. Another wet land area you set up with us and taught us a lot so thank you.

- Bonnie Miller  
10/25/19

Something I learned that I found fascinating was the aeration tank. I learned that if someone were to fall inside the aeration tank, they wouldn't be able to swim, so if someone were to save them they would have to turn off the aeration tank to save them.

Lexi Tran 10-29-19 12th Period

Dear Mr. Gordon

Mr. Gordon was very nice to us & he showed & explained to us which spot did what & he was chill. I learned a lot & found out where waste goes & how it gets filtered.

I am thankful for Shannon because he made the trip funny and told us so much things about water and how they are treating the water there and shows us some spider there.

- I learned that micro organisms are a integral part of wastewater treatment, but they need to be removed at the end of the process.
- The microorganisms need to be fed with dissolved oxygen in the water, which is why water is aerated.

Gordon taught me about the water that gets filtered and how it goes to the lake. He also taught me about how the fresh water was hard to get back because of Harvey.

Kaden Tran  
Deschler 1st 12th

Thank you everyone for helping us and taking the time out of your day to help us.

I would like to say thank to Gordon for showing us around and teaching us about the waste.

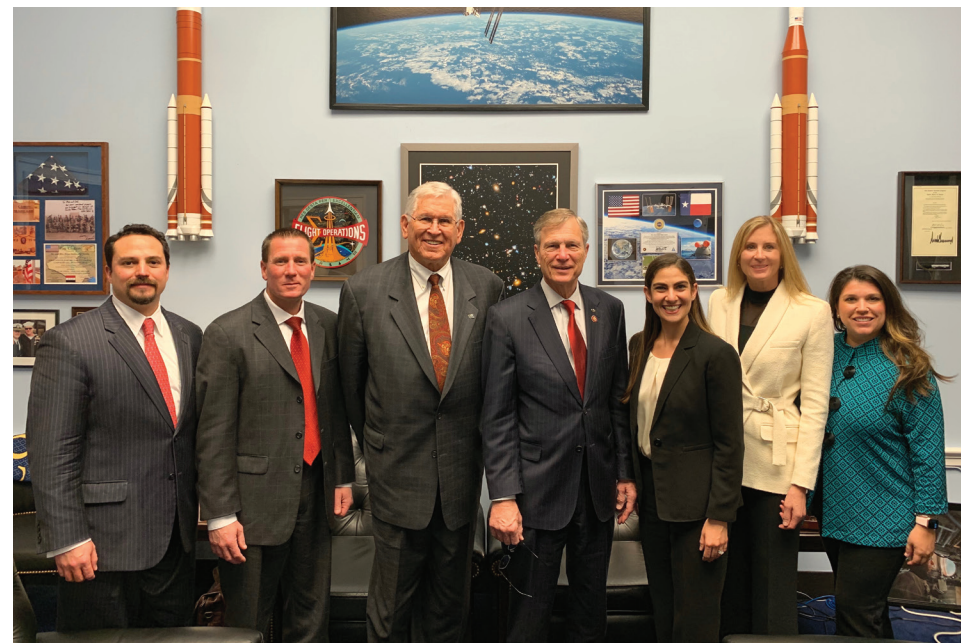
Thank you Shannon for teaching me how to fix my tire and get me that milk. I learned a lot from you and I think you were the best tour guide out of everyone.



# GCA UPDATES FEDERAL REPRESENTATIVES

Last February, GCA board members Kevin Scott, Mark Schultz and Gloria Matt along with CEO Lori Traweek and Assistant General Manager Liz Fazio Hale visited members of our Texas delegation in Washington, D.C. The goal was to bring them up speed about GCA efforts to serve Texas by delivering on our mission to protect the waters of the state while also promoting economic development statewide.

“We would like to thank Congressmen Pete Olson (below), Randy Weber (top right) and Dr. Brian Babin (bottom right) for taking the time to meet with us and for all they do for Texas!” said CEO Lori Traweek. “We appreciate the opportunity to share our ongoing efforts and solicit their thinking on how we can better serve our customer base and the state by promoting a strong economy.”







## US SENATE STAFFER TOURS BAYPORT

In March, Ben DeLeon from U.S. Senator John Cornyn's office visited the Bayport facility to view the latest improvements underway and gain a deeper understanding of its operations.

"It was great to share our focus on protecting the waters of the state and highlight our work to promote economic development in our region," said CEO Lori Traweek. "Thanks for coming, Ben!"

*Lori Traweek (right) with (from left) Liz Fazio Hale, Assistant General Manager; Jeff Nuff, Bayport Operations Supervisor; Ben DeLeon; and Ben Reese, Bayport Safety Coordinator.*



# GCA ADDS TO BODY OF KNOWLEDGE ON PERACETIC ACID TECHNOLOGY

In 2016, GCA commissioned a peracetic acid system for its Washburn Tunnel facility. The technical knowledge from that experience continues to be shared with the industry.

Peracetic acid can be used as a disinfectant for wastewater in place of the more commonly used bleach. While more expensive on a per-unit basis, it can require less space and its byproducts are more environmentally benign than those produced by chlorine.

“The technology can be very site specific and is perhaps more useful in an industrial wastewater setting than for a municipal facility,” said Phyllis Frank, Washburn Tunnel Facility Manager. “Given our limited space, it made sense for us as peracetic acid’s quicker reaction time means it requires less area. After weighing the pros and cons – and with a lot of thoughtful upfront planning – we went ahead with it.”

While widely used in Europe, prior to 2016 there had only been a few small-scale applications in the U.S. That meant that the Environmental Protection Agency and the industry were interested in learning more about GCA’s experience with the approach.

Recently the Water Environment Federation, the largest technical professional organization for wastewater and water treatment in the U.S., published a book covering lessons learned on the technology. Members of the GCA team – Leonard Levine, Joanne MacDougall and Carl Hennagir – served on the work group that put the book together.

## PERACETIC ACID DISINFECTION Implementation Considerations for Water Resource Recovery Facilities



**Water Environment  
Federation**  
the water quality people®

## HARRIS NAMED TO NEW FLOOD PLANNING COMMITTEE

The Texas Water Development Board has appointed Scott Harris, GCA’s Chief Operating Officer, to represent water utilities on the Trinity Regional Flood Planning Group (RFPG). The group is one of 15 flood planning regions that’s work will inform a comprehensive state flood plan. The 2019 Texas Legislature created the new planning effort to protect against loss of life and property from flooding.

Each RFPG is charged with identifying short- and long-term flood mitigation and floodplain management goals, flood risk evaluation needs, flood management strategies and flood mitigation projects. The group is required to deliver a plan by January 2023 that serves the entire region, taking into consideration the flood-related needs of all regional interests and with recommendations on flood management goals, evaluations, strategies and flood mitigation projects.





# TWO PROMOTED TO NEW ROLES

## Gulf Coast Authority promoted two employees in August.

Brianna Morales was named Assistant Facility Manager of the Bayport facility, GCA's largest operation. With more than 12 years of industry experience, Morales previously served as Facility Manager for GCA's Blackhawk facility.

Replacing Morales is Shannon Miftari as Blackhawk's current Facility Manager. His responsibilities include managing the operations, maintenance, compliance and finances of the facility. Miftari previously served as Operations Supervisor at Blackhawk.

"We are fortunate to have such an accomplished group at GCA," said CEO Lori Traweek, "and Brianna and Shannon are certainly two of our best. These are well deserved promotions."



*Brianna Morales*



*Shannon Miftari*

# CONGRATS TO OUR SCRIPT AWARD WINNERS

SCRIPT awards are given to employees whose actions exemplify GCA values: **S**tewardship, **C**ommunication, **R**eliability, **I**ntegrity, **P**lanning and **T**eamwork.



## John Martin - Operator II

John Martin was nominated by his co-workers at the Washburn Tunnel Facility for his actions in proactively responding to a potential process issue. While the disinfection process involved was not normally part of his duties, he acted quickly when he noticed the problem, leading to a timely fix. His ability to recognize and act quickly prevented a processing and communications problem, and ensured process integrity was maintained. Martin was recognized with the SCRIPT award for his living the GCA values by seeing, acting appropriately and giving a proper "heads-up" to co-workers.



## Chuck Williston - Operator II

When the 40-Acre lab was due for an up-grade, Chuck Williston was quick to volunteer to help manage the new set-up. He inventoried all unnecessary and outdated equipment, glassware and other items for proper disposal. He set up the workbenches, analyzing and testing equipment effectively and efficiently. When the supplier arrived for the final testing, Williston had the equipment ready. He also was instrumental in the design of the sample stations for field testing. Chuck's SCRIPT award recognizes continual process improvement and his willingness to try new ideas and share his experiences with others.



## RETIREMENTS

### Hennagir says good-bye after 45 years

GCA said a fond farewell to Carl Hennagir as he retired Sept. 1 after 45 years at the Authority. He was GCA's longest-serving active employee.

Carl joined the fledgling Gulf Coast Waste Disposal Authority from Olin Corp. in February 1975 as technical advisor at Washburn Tunnel. The facility was in the process of being upgraded from a pulp and paper treatment facility to include refining and chemical plant wastes, and Carl's job was to provide technical assistance for startup.

Once the Technical Services group was formed, Carl moved to Central Office where he could provide technical support to all GCA facilities.

Carl held a variety of positions in the Technical Services Department before becoming its director. In addition of sharing his broad technical expertise with the GCA team, he was responsible for the personnel and administrative functions of the department.

"Carl has the distinction of being the only engineer who has completed successful projects at each and every one of the GCA facilities," said Technical Services Director Leonard Levine. "He was considered as one of the GCA 'go-to guys' in several areas of industrial waste management and his drive for perfection and attention to detail will be sorely missed."

During his time at GCA, Carl and his wife Deborah had two children, Carl Jr. and Catherine, now both grown with families of their own. Carl is looking forward to spending more time with his four grandchildren, one boy and three girls.



### Organizer extraordinaire Norton retires

Lynda Norton retired in August after a very productive career. As Executive Assistant, she supported CEO Lori Traweek and coordinated board functions. She worked at GCA for 15 years.

Called the "single most organized person ever" by GCA staff, Lynda was a nominee and finalist for the Coleen Barrett Administrative Excellence in 2019. In addition to her day job, she was instrumental in planning events like Stability, GCA team celebrations and expanded staff meetings, as well as managing the books and sponsors for Trash Bash®.

"Lynda has been our backbone in so many ways," said CEO Lori Traweek. "She was such a joy to work with and never hesitant to shoulder extra work. She truly made the trains run on time around here and is already sorely missed."

In retirement, Lynda is enjoying her many hobbies, including painting and making stained glass and jewelry.



## GCA Board Re-Elects Serving Officers

The statute creating the Authority provides for the election of officers serving on the Board of Directors. The Governance and Nominating Committee Chairman Chris Peden presented the committee's nomination for the board officer elections at the Sept. 10 routine (monthly) GCA Board of Directors meeting. The nomination presented was to re-elect the current slate of board officers (below) to serve another two-year term and it was approved.

### THE OFFICERS SERVING ARE

Chairman: Franklin D.R. Jones, Jr.

Vice Chair: Rita E. Standridge

Secretary: W. Chris Peden

Treasurer: Kevin Scott

Congratulations to these officers and our gratitude for their continuing service to GCA.





## BOARD OF DIRECTORS



Franklin D.R. Jones, Jr.  
Chairman of the Board,  
Harris County



Rita E. Standridge  
Vice Chair,  
Chambers County



W. Chris Peden  
Secretary,  
Galveston County



Kevin Scott  
Treasurer,  
Galveston County



J.M. "Mark" Schultz  
Member,  
Chambers County



Billy Enochs  
Member,  
Galveston County



Lamont E. Meaux  
Member,  
Chambers County



Gloria Matt  
Member,  
Harris County

## LEADERSHIP TEAM



Lori Traweek  
Chief Executive Officer



Elizabeth Fazio Hale  
Asst. General Manager



Scott Harris  
Chief Operating Officer



Gordon Pederson  
Chief Technical Officer



## CORE VALUES

<b>S</b>	<b>STEWARDSHIP</b>
<b>C</b>	<b>COMMUNICATION</b>
<b>R</b>	<b>RELIABILITY</b>
<b>I</b>	<b>INTEGRITY</b>
<b>P</b>	<b>PLANNING</b>
<b>T</b>	<b>TEAMWORK</b>



Protecting the waters of the State of Texas through  
environmentally sound, economically feasible and technologically  
advanced wastewater and water management practices.

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