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McLemore provides fixes to utilities' water leakage

BY ED HICKS

Thomas Wolfe wrote that you can't go home again, but Kerry Collins hopes you can. Collins, founder of McLemore Water Services, just committed to a five-year project in Nashville, as he continues to build his 5-year-old Memphis-based business.

McLemore Water Services Commercial and Industrial water meter services company
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McLemore, which now has six employees, will operate as a subcontractor to Miami-based Water Systems Optimization, Inc., a business of the Bristol Water Holdings Group.

WSO, which currently is providing water audit services for the Nashville-

Davidson County Metro Water and Sewerage Services Department under a three-year contract, will take the work to the next level.

McLemore is going along. It's frequently the way small businesses get work and build customer relationships.

"There are some jobs I might never have gotten if I'd tried as an individual," Collins says.

McLemore is not new to WSO. The company brought McLemore into the auditing project once it got underway.

A water audit involves testing the accuracy of water meters. It is conducted on a random sample of meters to get a



ALAN HOWELL / MBJ

Kerry Collins will work on a multi-million dollar water audit in Nashville.

broad idea of leakage throughout a utility's system. The audit also involves looking at records.

"It's just like going into a store and doing an inventory," Collins says.

Chris Leauber, vice president of business development at WSO and deputy director of the Nashville project, says the audit relies on industry standards recognized around the world.

"We can look at a water utility here and compare its efficiency to a water utility in Egypt," Leauber says.

Within the industry there's a level of leakage that's considered economically feasible. After that, the utility is losing money, and the customer is going to pick up the bill for wasted water.

"All water utilities will have leakage," Leauber says. "But many have excessive

amounts of leakage."

That's where WSO's five-year implementation survey contract comes in. When an audit has determined an excessive amount of leakage, the survey tracks it to its sources. WSO will identify the leak locations so Metro Water can fix them.

Leauber says that water utilities should have audits every year, but don't.

"With leakage, it's out of sight, out of mind," he says.

Sometimes utilities undertake efforts to conserve water, and it backfires. For example, when a utility tells customers they need to conserve water, and they do, it reduces the revenue stream for the utility. Then the utility tightens its budget and doesn't have funds for an audit.

Leauber says the Nashville utility is getting pro-active.

"We needed to know where we were," says Metro Water's Leanne Scott, the audit's director.

The three-year audit is bringing in \$550,000 to WSO. Metro Water and Sewerage will pay WSO \$5 million for the implementation contract, which is set up for an initial term of one year, renewable for up to five years. McLemore gets a percentage of both projects for its work.

Leauber found McLemore by word of mouth. He says a company he's worked with for 20 years recommended Collins.

"He has a smart mission out there," Leauber says.

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