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'You Just Have to Keep Doing It'

Confessions of Meter Madness Junkies

by Carol Carpenter

Water utility employees who regularly take part in AWWA's Meter Madness contests willingly acknowledge there's more than a touch of insatiable devotion to the process of quickly, accurately, and competitively assembling water meters. Just ask Lionel Galvin, Tim Sensibaugh, and David Worthey—all of them Meter Madness addicts.

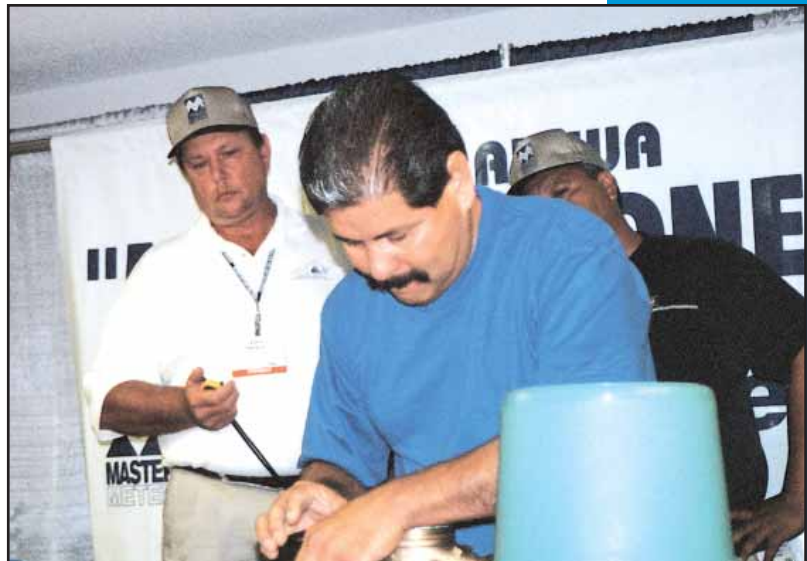
Galvin, a utility serviceman for the Corpus Christi (Texas) Water Department, has won first place at AWWA's Distribution System Symposium national Meter Madness competition for the past two years. With a lightning-quick posted time of 20.24 seconds overall at the New Orleans contest in 2000, he knows the rush of adrenaline in moving as fast as possible to assemble a meter that registers water, has no loose parts, and doesn't leak.

Looking forward to another attempt this month at the ninth annual DSS competition in San Diego, Galvin hopes to defend his title as much for his utility as for himself. The best part of winning, Galvin emphasized, is representing Corpus Christi at a national meet. "I really like doing it and believe I can pull it off a third time," he said, adding that the secret to assembling a meter quickly and accurately is "lots of practice."

Making It Work

Sensibaugh, the first-round winner in 2000, acknowledges he's a "Meter Madness junkie" who thoroughly enjoys the competition. The Fort Wayne, Ind., meter repairman and section champion enters—and regularly wins—contests at the regional, state, and national levels. Sensibaugh said he gets "a thrill putting the meter together and making it work."

Although his fast first-round win last year (18.49 seconds) looked promising for a final



Lionel Galvin's dexterity and speed have earned him two national Meter Madness titles.

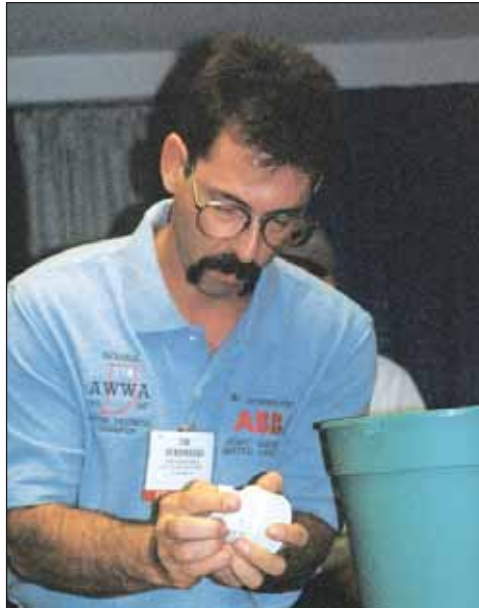
blue-ribbon finish, penalties increased his time overall, and he was edged out in the second heat by three other entrants, including Galvin. The second-place winner was Texas state champ Johnny Rodriguez of San Antonio, with an overall time of 21.18 seconds, and the third-place finisher was Ronny Bakker of Spotsylvania County, Va., with a no-error finish of 23.13 seconds.

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Tim Sensibaugh concentrates on assembling a meter during the 2000 Meter Madness Contest at the Distribution System Symposium.

Another Texan, David Worthey of the city of Austin's Water and Wastewater Utility, has been entering Meter Madness contests since 1995. He has earned several second- and third-place times at the state level and one second-place finish at the national level in 1998. While he's not certain if he will be able to attend the DSS this year, he's happy for the many opportunities he's had to participate in Meter Madness contests to date.

He was especially pleased when his impressive win in 1998 attracted the attention of a local television station, giving him and his utility some positive public recognition. "I enjoy racing the clock and trying not to make mistakes," Worthey said. "During the contest, stress levels can be high, but you have to stay calm if you expect to do well."

Rules of the Contest

Just exactly what happens during Meter Madness? Although contestants may be grouped in a single round, they are timed separately. Each person assembles his or her own meter and is given a raw score, which later can be increased by penalties.

Before the clock begins, every contestant is provided with a bucket containing a completely disassembled meter. Each container also holds three to six miscellaneous, unrelated metallic parts from meters other than the one participants are asked to assemble, which ensures they are thoroughly familiar with all parts of a specific meter.

Each individual is allowed 10 min to complete a turn. Two turns are allowed, with the fastest of the two times used as the final official time. When contestants have completely assembled their meters, they immediately raise both hands and step back from the table.

Depending on various factors, such as leaking or dripping connections, safety violations, meters too loose or failing to register flows, penalties are assessed, adding time to overall raw finish times. The person with the fastest time, including penalties, is the winner.

All contests are supervised by officials with extensive experience in water meter maintenance and familiarity with the model and manufacturer of the meter (a different brand of meter is provided each year) being used in the event.

Although Galvin, Sensibaugh, and everyone else who enters the contest year after year have their individual reasons for preparing for and participating in these pulse-accelerating competitions of knowledge and skill, Worthey, perhaps, speaks for all when he states, "Once (competing) gets in your blood, you just have to keep doing it." 