



Metropolitan Water Reclamation District of Greater Chicago

# Press Release

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## Open House Chicago descends on MWRD's O'Brien Plant



*Tony Bukala, Treatment Plant Operator II, gives guests a tour of the O'Brien Water Reclamation Plant.*

A crowd of more than 700 visitors flowed into the Metropolitan Water Reclamation District of Greater Chicago's (MWRD's) O'Brien Water Reclamation Plant (WRP) in Skokie to learn how a rich history of architecture has also housed the critical work of the MWRD to protect the local water environment.

The Oct. 19 tours were part of the MWRD's second year of participation in the Chicago Architecture Center's annual Open House Chicago (OHC) architecture festival, introducing the public to 350 of the Chicago area's most iconic and unique architectural treasures all over one weekend each year.

Curious tourgoers were guided by MWRD staff through a behind-the-scenes look into the important operations that transform wastewater into clean water and the many innovative and resourceful processes that have sparked recent recreational demand along the North Shore Channel and Chicago River.

"Thank you to the Chicago Architecture Center for selecting our facility to provide an educational and in-



*The O'Brien Service Building was one of the featured buildings on the architecture tour. It was constructed in 1928 and houses the boilers for plant heating, the storeroom, and all trades shops. Inside the tall tower is a large water tank that has a 150,000 gallon capacity.*

ving forum that engages many of the neighbors we serve," said MWRD Commissioner Josina Morita. "The O'Brien plant represents distinguished architecture and also high-functioning systems that work around the clock to protect our water environment."

O'Brien WRP is home to both historic and modern facilities, such as the Pump and Blower Building, which is eligible for listing on the National Register of Historical Places, and the more modern ultraviolet (UV) disinfection facility built in 2016. *(continued)*



## Open House Chicago descends on MWRD's O'Brien Plant, *cont.*



*President Kari K. Steele greets visitors at the O'Brien WRP open house.*

It was constructed in 1928 and has not changed much since original construction, providing six main sewage pumps and seven blowers that are adjusted into service depending on the plant flow and weather conditions.

Built in 1927 and placed into service in 1928 as the North Side Sewage Treatment Works, the WRP is considered part of modern architecture, emerging after World War I but before the Great Depression. The original structures at O'Brien WRP have a simplicity of style, where decoration is minimal, and form follows function. But details of the plant show the ornamentation of architecture's Machine Age movement in which the machine is on full display. The WRP's blowers and pumps are not hidden behind walls.

"By opening our doors our visitors learned ways they can help protect our water resources while visiting these important architectural treasures," said Commissioner Marcelino Garcia.

O'Brien WRP today serves more than 1.3 million people residing in a 143-square-mile area that includes Chicago, north of Fullerton Avenue and the 17 suburbs in northern Cook County that extend to Lake County on the north, Lake Michigan on the east and Harlem Avenue and Des Plaines River on



*(L-R) MWRD Commissioners Cam Davis, Marcelino Garcia and Mariyana Spyropoulos*



*(L-R) MWRD Commissioner Debra Shore, Commissioner Josina Morita and son, and Exec. Director Brian Perkovich*

the west. The plant cleans an average of 230 million gallons of wastewater per day (mgd) and has the capacity to treat 450 mgd.

For those who could not participate in this event, the MWRD offers tours of its WRPs and other facilities throughout the year. For more information, please contact the MWRD Office of Public Affairs at (312) 751-6633 or email [public.affairs@mwrld.org](mailto:public.affairs@mwrld.org).

### ***Recovering Resources, Transforming Water***

*Established in 1889, the MWRD ([www.mwrld.org](http://www.mwrld.org)) is an award winning, special purpose government agency responsible for wastewater treatment and stormwater management in Cook County, Illinois.*