



Metropolitan Water Reclamation District of Greater Chicago

# Press Release

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## **Former MWRD President Terry O'Brien passes away** *Third generation MWRD family member protected water environment for 24 years*



*In 2012, the MWRD renamed its Skokie facility, formerly known as the North Side Water Reclamation Plant, in honor of former Board of Commissioners President Terrence J. O'Brien.*

Former Metropolitan Water Reclamation District of Greater Chicago (MWRD) President Terrence J. O'Brien followed in both his father and grandfather's footsteps to a devoted career at the MWRD. His father and grandfather worked at the MWRD's facility then known as the North Side Water Reclamation Plant (WRP) in Skokie, and by the time the younger O'Brien left after 24 years of service as commissioner of the MWRD, the facility bore his name.

The former MWRD president left a lasting imprint throughout many chapters of a life dedicated to his family, community, public service and improving the region's water environment. After a lengthy illness, President O'Brien died on Feb. 28. He was 64.

President O'Brien was first elected to a six-year term as a commissioner of the MWRD in November 1988. His presence on the Board of Commissioners was so effective that he went on to be re-elected three times by the people of Cook County. During that time, he was also elected by his fellow commissioners as president of the MWRD in 1997 and then unanimously re-elected president eight times.

"I have been honored to follow in the footsteps of longtime MWRD President, Commissioner and friend Terrence J. O'Brien," said MWRD President Kari K. Steele. "It was President O'Brien's leadership and principles that carved a path for all of us to protect public health and our water environment and provide excellent, innovative and reliable service that taxpayers across Cook County deserve. We are forever grateful for his 24 years of service and dedication to the people of Cook County and our environment. His family legacy will forever be instilled in the work of the MWRD."

Over 24 years as commissioner, President O'Brien never missed a meeting. He was integral in improving water quality in the Chicago River and area waterways; protecting the source of drinking water in Lake Michigan; advancing the MWRD's Tunnel and Reservoir Plan (TARP); spearheading legislative efforts to recognize the MWRD as the regional stormwater authority for Cook County to address flooding; helping create the MWRD's Information Technology Department; instituting a pollution hotline to report illegal dumping; and demonstrating remarkable financial stewardship to prepare future stability at the MWRD for generations to come. Under his watch as President, O'Brien helped the MWRD maintain a AAA bond rating, marketed MWRD real estate to introduce new revenue streams, and abated more than \$262 million, returning it to Cook County property owners while still offering them an essential yet affordable wastewater treatment service.

A Chicago native, President O'Brien graduated in 1978 from John Carroll University in Cleveland, Ohio. For more than four decades he worked for various consulting firms, managing engineering projects to protect the environment, including 24 years at K-Plus Engineering, which provided stormwater management, civil and environmental engineering, and construction administration services.

President O'Brien's project management skills stemmed from a long career in environmental and civil engineering. This helped him bring extensive knowledge to the MWRD to enhance, streamline and deliver many essential projects at the least possible cost to taxpayers. Under his leadership, the MWRD secured more than \$800 million in funding to complete the first phase of TARP, constructing and putting into operation 109 miles of deep tunnels to collect stormwater and polluted water and prevent it from backing up into basements, streets and waterways.

Like his father, William O'Brien, who worked as a painter leadman, and his grandfather, John Hickey, who worked as an operating engineer, President O'Brien inspired many at the MWRD. In November 2012, his fellow commissioners and staff commemorated his service by renaming the North Side Water Reclamation Plant as the Terrence J. O'Brien Water Reclamation Plant. During his tenure, President O'Brien received numerous awards and participated in many professional organizations. He also donated his time to numerous community organizations and functions.

"As a third-generation member of the MWRD family, President O'Brien instilled in all commissioners and staff a genuine sense of pride and service toward protecting our water resources and managing stormwater for area homes and businesses," said MWRD Vice President Barbara McGowan. "He was integral in advancing the MWRD's Tunnel and Reservoir Plan, helped recognize the MWRD as the regional stormwater authority for Cook County, instituted a pollution hotline to report illegal dumping, and demonstrated remarkable financial stewardship to prepare us for generations to come."

Following his time at the MWRD, he founded the O'Brien Network, LLC. Since 2016, President O'Brien's firm offered a range of services to clients, such as business development, governmental relations, consulting advisory, strategic services, coalition building and project oversight.

President O'Brien is survived by his wife Julie, and three children, Kevin, Therese and Patrick.

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Recovering Resources, Transforming Water  
*Established in 1889, the Metropolitan Water Reclamation District of Greater Chicago (MWRD) is an award-winning, special purpose government agency responsible for wastewater treatment and stormwater management in Cook County, Illinois. Learn more at [mwrdd.org](http://mwrdd.org).*