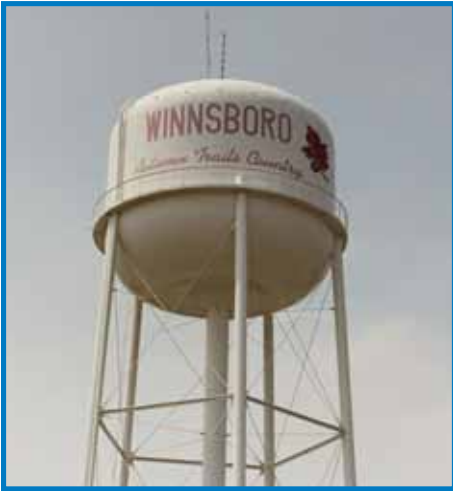


## CASE STUDY

# ORION®

## Radio Frequency System



City of Winnsboro, Texas

## ORION® Helps Texas City Solve Personnel Problems

By: Ted Schaar

“Well, I guess the major reasons we explored moving to an AMR system,” said Winnsboro, Texas, Director of Water Utilities Joey LaCaze, “were to replace our 30-year-old multi-jet meters and to resolve the high turnover we experienced in meter readers. Our meters are housed in meter boxes in the ground, and manual reading involved a lot of bending in addition to walking.”

LaCaze said it took a physically fit person to fill the reader position, especially during the cold and hot months. “Even though we hired the most reliable people we could find,” he continued, “quite a few would resign a day or two before a planned read, which put us in a bind. To get the job done, we had to transfer people from another area, and that really lowered morale for employees who worked years to move out of the reading position but were then asked to read meters temporarily on a fairly regular basis.”

### Established in 1854

Winnsboro is located in the northeast corner of Texas, about 90 miles from Dallas. It became a community in 1854 when John E. Winn built a residence and called his settlement Crossroads. The town was renamed in Winn’s honor in 1901, and today has a population just shy of 3,600.

Water comes from Lake Cypress Springs, which many consider to be the best source in the state. “We pump our water about eight miles and filter it through our treatment facility before distributing it to customers,” LaCaze explained. Winnsboro residents and businesses consume an average of 700,000 gallons every day.

For many years, Winnsboro relied on “books and pencils,” LaCaze said, “and there was talk of upgrading to a touch-read system, but we figured that would be obsolete within five years.” Ultimately, LaCaze, City Manager Ronnie Knight, and the city council decided an Automatic Meter Reading (AMR) system would serve the community best now and in the future.

### Consultant hired

C.T. Brannon Corporation, a civil engineering firm located in Tyler, Texas, was hired to help Winnsboro decide *what* to buy. “After investigating meters and AMR systems,” LaCaze continued, “Brannon’s engineers recommended Badger® because they felt the company offered the best meters and that ORION® was the best AMR system. The Badger system wasn’t the least or the most expensive, but cost was a secondary consideration.”



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#### About the Author:

Ted Schaar is a freelance writer based in Brookfield, Wisconsin.

## Case Study: ORION® Helps Texas City Solve Personnel Problems

Sales Representative Hal Deacon of Atlas Utility Supply Company, the distributor that provided the Badger products, said: “ORION® is a great system for communities like Winnsboro. I’ve been in the water business a long time and can’t say enough good things about ORION. It’s a remarkable system in every way.”

### Separate mountings appreciated

LaCaze said one of the new system’s features he and other utility personnel liked most was that the meter register and transponder are mounted separately from the meter. “A 22 AWG wire runs between the components, so they’re easy to replace without having to change out the whole assembly. We think this will make maintaining the Badger® meters much easier than maintaining meters offered by other companies.”

Installation of the new ORION-ready meters was handled by Dual Construction of Texarkana, Texas. “We

put in all new Badger positive displacement meters,” LaCaze said.

Customers were notified that their water would be shut off for up to 15 minutes before Dual Construction did the upgrade. “For the most part, the installation was straightforward,” LaCaze continued, “but every once in a while we found leaky steel pipes and broken curb-stops (the valve the meter is connected to) that had to be replaced.”

### Residents skeptical

Residents accustomed to seeing meter readers in their front yards were skeptical of the new system’s ability to read meters remotely. “When we first used ORION, about 30 customers called because they didn’t believe the system could be getting accurate reads without anyone visiting their homes,” LaCaze recalled. “To ease their concerns, we visited each one and showed



*Ronnie Knight and Pam Simms from the City of Winnsboro, Texas*

them the actual reading on the meter in the box. That satisfied them that the radio reads were accurate.”

### Major efficiency improvement

The new ORION system has brought a great deal of efficiency to the City of Winnsboro, according to LaCaze. “Before we had ORION, it took two readers five days to get the numbers. Now, one technician does the entire city in just four hours. That’s a huge improvement and frees our people to do other tasks.”

LaCaze is also satisfied with Badger Meter and Atlas Utility Supply Company. “We’ve had very few problems and those were solved as they came up. Everything’s working fine now and the support we’re getting is excellent.” ■



*J.D. Boyd (inside truck) and Tony LaCaze from the City of Winnsboro, Texas*