

CASE STUDY

ORION®

Radio Frequency System



ORION® Radio Frequency System

ORION® Selected for Peculiar

By: Ted Schaar

There are many thousands of municipalities in the United States, but just as a postmaster predicted more than a century ago, it's hard to imagine one with a more memorable name than Peculiar, Missouri. Peculiar is located 30 miles south of Kansas City and has a population of about 2,600.

According to Peculiar's website, the name was coined in the mid-1800s, when early residents approached the district postmaster with three possible names for their settlement. The postmaster said all three names were already taken, so the settlers asked him to choose a name for them, "so long as it is sort of peculiar." After giving the matter some thought, the postmaster replied in a letter, "My conclusion is that in all the land it would be difficult to imagine a more distinctive, more peculiar, name than *Peculiar*." The settlers agreed and the name was adopted.

Water from the Missouri River

For most of Peculiar's history, residents used cisterns to collect water, said City Clerk Nora Dodge: "Then, in 1959, a reservoir was formed by building a dam across Wolf Creek, which runs through town. Water from the reservoir was treated and pumped to residents for more than 30 years." However, in 1991, Peculiar began purchasing water from Water District Number 2, which receives it from Kansas City. Kansas City draws the water from the Missouri River.

Outside vendor collected readings

City of Peculiar Senior Accountant/Utilities Carol Armintrout said Peculiar has used water meters since the 1960s to pass costs on to citizens. "We have about 1,350 installed currently, she said. "For many years, we contracted with an outside vendor to collect readings for us, but last year we were taken by surprise when the vendor announced it was getting out of the business. We couldn't find a another company to do the job and didn't want to have city employees walking routes, so we had to come up with a new solution."

Armintrout and her colleagues explained the situation to the city council and received its approval to investigate Automatic Meter Reading (AMR) systems. "We were already replacing older meters with Badger® products and were very happy with them, so we talked with Chuck Tindall, our Badger account representative, and he recommended ORION®."

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About the Author:

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PECULIAR CASE



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ORION® picked over two competitors

In addition to Badger Meter, the city received bids from two other companies.

“A couple of our people had been in the water business for some time and liked Badger Meter,” Armintrout continued. “It also meant a lot to us that Chuck explained things thoroughly and always answered our questions patiently. That’s very important when you have a small operation in a small town. We also thought the ORION system was the easiest to operate, so we picked Badger®.”

ORION didn’t have to be sold to residents, Armintrout recalled, “because it really wasn’t going to have a financial impact on them. In fact, we figured it would pay for itself pretty quickly.” Entering citizen homes was also unnecessary because almost all of Peculiar’s meters are housed in pits.

Two teams perform installations

“To do the conversions, we put together two teams of two people each,” Armintrout explained. During Peculiar’s

short snowy season, the teams drilled holes in the pit lids so they would be able to accept the ORION transponder that needs to peek out slightly. “You can barely see it,” Armintrout said.



Peculiar Water Department Staff (Back Row): Charlie Mohr, Oren Bates, Mike Fisher, Rick McGee, and Aaron Reid. (Front Row): Carol Armintrout and Nora Dodge

With the arrival of better weather, the teams installed the new meters with the ORION transponders already attached. “We had to be done by April,” Armintrout emphasized, “because our vendor’s last reading month was March. Our people made a game out of it and competed to see who could get the most done in one day. Pretty soon every one was changed out.”

The conversion to the Badger Meter ORION system was completed on schedule and now the city has had AMR for more than a year. “It’s gone very well,” said Armintrout. “Today, it only takes about 90 minutes to do all 1,350 meters using the ORION laptop.”

Armintrout pointed out that water revenues have increased, mainly because some of the older meters were not recording accurately. “A few people have complained that their water bills have gone up, but we just tell them that they were getting free water for years and that usually makes them feel better,” she laughed.

Another problem solved

ORION has solved at least one other problem for the Peculiar Water Department. “Some residents don’t like the way the pits look,” Armintrout said, “so they lay sod over them. Before we had ORION, this caused us some grief when our people needed to find the pit to access the meter. However, the sod doesn’t matter now, because with ORION we don’t have to see the meter to get a read.” ■