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Reeves ending 27-year run as CPW chief

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Greenwood Commissioners of Public Works Manager Steve Reeves looks over figures at the W.J. Wise Water Treatment Plant. Reeves is retiring this summer after a 27-year career.



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Greenwood Commissioners of Public Works Manager Steve Reeves, inspects a lagoon at the utility's water treatment plant.

As a boy growing up in Newberry where his father ran a grocery store, Steve Reeves made a promise to himself.

“People used to come and complain about a lot of things and I told my father, ‘I’ll never go into public service,’” Reeves, 63, said.

But sometimes, life has other ideas. And Reeves, who has spent the last 42 years working for municipal utilities – including 27 as head of Greenwood’s Commissioners of Public Works – is looking back fondly on his career in the public sector.

“It’s been challenging and rewarding,” Reeves said. Like many high-tech industries, evolutions in computing, construction, data collection and other areas have revolutionized the field.

“When I first got here, we were still reading meters with paper and pencil. Now, we can literally read meters from here in the office. We can shut people on and off with services from right here, so from paper to that technology is pretty amazing,” Reeves said.

When he officially retires later this summer, he’ll do so as the second longest serving manager of CPW, behind only A.J. Sprowles, who ran it from 1899 to 1927. Reeves informed the CPW board in January of his decision, and officials went public with the news in May to begin recruiting his successor.

“I have children and grandchildren from Little Mountain to Lexington. Somebody told me one time, ‘when you’re ready to retire, you’ll know it,’ and at the end of last year, there was just something inside that told me it was time to leave and let somebody else take over the reins for a while,” Reeves said.

Reeves plan to stay on board until his replacement is found, which could take several months.

“The commissioners will do the interviewing. I’ll assist them if they request, or stay completely out of it if they request,” he said. “It’s totally up to them.”

With a \$61 million budget and 148 employees, CPW plays a major role in economic development and growth opportunities not only in Greenwood, but across the Lakelands.

Because CPW runs on rate payer dollars, Reeves said he demands accountability from his staff, and supports full transparency so customers understand how the company runs – including offering public tours of its nationally acclaimed water treatment plant.

“We’re scrutinized as many are in the public sector. If we’re driving down the road and exceeding the speed limit in a CPW truck, I’ll probably get a phone call. People keep a close eye on you and if things are going badly, then they’ll let you know, and they should,” Reeves said.

“We should be an example for the community, not the exception.”

David Tuck, superintendent of CPW's W.R. Wise Water Treatment Plant, is one of the few employees with more time in than Reeves, at 28 years. Over that time, he's seen the facility nearly triple its capacity from 12 million to 33 million gallons per day.

Tuck said Reeves has been a strong leader.

"Over the years, I've gotten great support from Steve and the commissioners. Whenever I foresaw in the regulations that we had to do something to stay ahead of the curve, they were always willing to support that effort to give us the funding we need to meet and even exceed those regulations, so it's been a good working relationship," Tuck said.

In addition to handling more than 55,000 electric meters, (with an average restoration time of 35 minutes after outages), CPW serves 80 percent of Greenwood County's water and gas. Gas services are also provided to portions of Abbeville, Anderson, Greenville and Laurens counties.

Reeves said his approach to the job is guided by the mission of CPW's board.

"When you're in public service and you're answering to three elected officials, it only takes two votes to end your career, so you're aware of that when you take the job," he said.

An engineer by trade with a degree from the University of South Carolina, Reeves said he's happy to stay out of the limelight.

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