

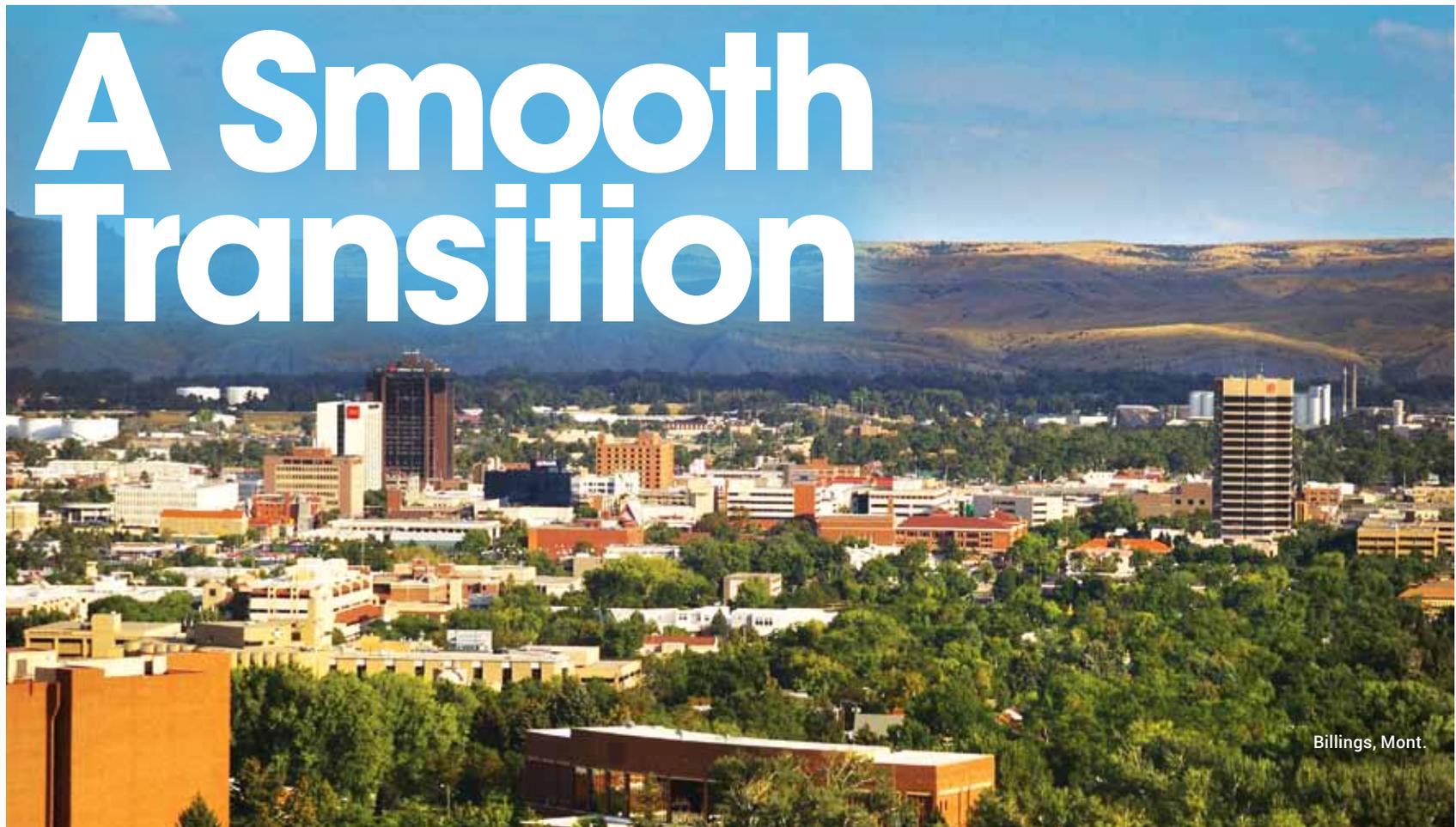
**D**ivision Manager Dwile Weigel has spent 26 years working for the Public Works Utilities (PWU) of Billings, Mont. Field Supervisor Mark Holmes has worked for PWU for 30 years.

Neptune Technology Group and PWU also began their partnership long ago, in the 1950s. PWU was an early adopter of Neptune's ARB absolute encoder meter reading technology in the 1960s.

"The quality of their technology and meters has

excessive water consumption," Weigel said.

Now, with installation of the R900 Gateways 88% complete, PWU can collect 94% of its readings without a truck. And while the city is still "fine tuning" the system, as Weigel put it, its customers are already reaping the benefits of more frequent readings. "Leaks are found faster," he said. "We can tell customers when the problems started, and they realize they had company at the time they didn't remember, or that's when professional sprinkler services came by. Neptune has helped us help the customer."



Billings, Mont.

By Niki Peterson

## Billings, Mont., improves efficiencies with fixed network meter reading

been very high, and the customer service we get from them and [Neptune distributor] Northwest Pipe Fittings has been very good," Weigel said.

PWU read its water meters manually until 1992, when it installed telephone-type meter interface units (MIUs). After customers began switching from landline to cellular phones, Weigel and his team began implementing R900 radio frequency (RF) MIUs in May 2003, using handhelds at first and then the MRX920 mobile data collector to get the meter readings. After a short time, Billings no longer needed its two full-time meter readers. As of August 2010, all of the city's 30,644 services have been read using R900 RF technology.

### Continued Improvements

In 2012, Weigel began talking with Neptune District Manager Tony Glassier about implementing R900 Gateway fixed network data collectors. "Instead of one reading per month, we wanted to collect multiple meter readings every day to be able to help customers who might have leaks or

### Customer Service

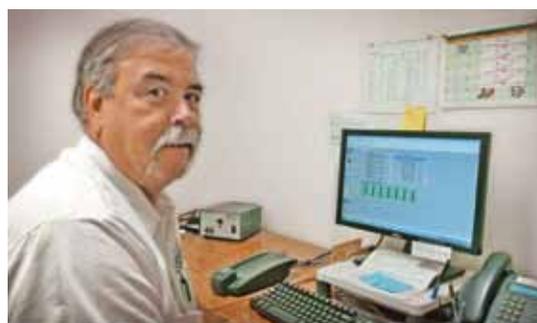
The city also no longer has to send utility vehicles for off-cycle reads. "When a tenant moves out and the water goes back under the landlord's name, we used to have to roll out a truck," Holmes said. "We don't anymore, and that's saved us 50 work orders a month."

According to Holmes, the transition to a fixed network has been smooth.

"We've found Neptune technology to be backward compatible with different types of reading systems," Weigel said. The R900 Gateways work just as smoothly with PWU's host software, encoders and MIUs as the MRX920 and handheld units that came before. In fact, personnel still use mobile reading as a backup method, with handhelds in reserve to collect re-reads or double check RF signals before leaving an MIU installation site.

Although the focus of migrating to fixed network reading has been to roll out fewer service trucks and improve customer service, the city has cut the number of hours per week it reads by half—from 12 to six.

"After we add the last R900 Gateway, we'll continue fine tuning so that we'll be able to read every meter through the fixed network," Weigel said. "We've got some businesses downtown where the RF units are located deep within thick-walled concrete basements. The [data collectors'] 1-watt added power will help us to get those buildings' meter readings." **w&wd**



Field Supervisor Mark Holmes has worked for PWU for 30 years.

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