

Groundwater Hits the Big Screen

Groundwater Guardian Result-Oriented Activity Profile

By John P. Paquin, Water Resources Manager, City of Kalamazoo, Michigan

Since 1992, the City of Kalamazoo's Wellhead Protection (WHP) Committee has worked hard to educate its approximately 122,000 water customers about the importance of protecting groundwater, its sole drinking water source, through school education programs; Michigan's first WHP website, www.protectyourwater.net; participation in local and regional events; distribution of groundwater protection materials; educational model demonstrations; articles; and presentations. However, at a WHP Meeting in November 2004, the City's Fire Marshal mentioned the idea of using pre-movie advertising, and committee members responded with interest.

The Process

The idea quickly evolved from a note on a paper napkin to a defined project. In December 2004, members began researching the digital capability of area theaters and what companies produced digital video ads. City staff initiated ad development by using PowerPoint®, which worked well since ad content could be easily viewed and edited. Three PowerPoint® ads with a question and answer trivia format were prepared.

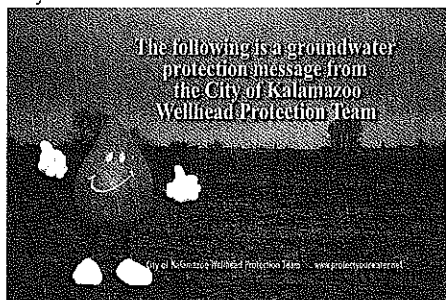
In January 2005, City staff met with Digital Talking Screen Media (DTSM), the company that prepared movie trailer ads for the Kalamazoo 10 Goodrich Quality Theaters. DTSM provided the committee with detailed demographics of moviegoers, which included 50,000 monthly and 600,000 annual attendance in all 10

theaters, making us realize the benefit of utilizing the advertising dollars spent by the movie industry.

DTSM worked to make the three initial PowerPoint® ads come alive by adding video motion, our animated water drop, and a professional voice. The City negotiated a one year contract with DTSM for \$21,060. Fortunately, the City had funding from a Michigan Department of Environmental Quality (MDEQ) WHP Grant.

Each ad was 30 seconds long, and shown approximately every five minutes within the 15 minutes of pre-movie advertising on all 10 screens. Each ad included the animated water drop, our website, recognized a MDEQ WHP Program Grant for funding, and noted that the ads were presented by the City of Kalamazoo WHP Committee.

The inaugural airing of the three ads was on March 18, 2005. The project ignited enthusiasm among the Committee to see the original idea make it all the way to the big screen in just four months. The response was immediate; within the first month, web page requests temporarily increased 65 percent!



More Ads and Contracts

From September 2005 to April 2006, five additional ads were created and aired with information about the proper disposal of household hazardous

chemicals, stormwater's impact on groundwater, recognition of local businesses with spill response plans, how residential land practices can impact water quality, and the importance of properly abandoning wells.

In November 2006, the City expanded its movie ad campaign to include the Kalamazoo RAVE Movie Theaters. A one-year contract in the amount of \$12,582 was initiated to show three "still" ads within their 15 minute pre-movie trailer in nine of their 14 screens, each ad on screen for five seconds. City staff again used PowerPoint® to prepare the ads, which resulted in an initial increase in website hits of approximately 30 percent.

MDEQ subsequently asked the City to assist other WHP communities in using the ads in their towns. The ads were made available and DTSM agreed to apply a minimal production charge to change minor text, such as the community name, in addition to screen time cost. The ads are now online at the DTSM, MDEQ, and www.protectyourwater.net websites.

The Lansing Tri-County Area Alliance used some of the ads and saw a significant increase in their website hits. Lansing also utilized WHP grant monies for this campaign as a way to reach new and younger audiences. The City of Battle Creek also has an effective cinema educational campaign that started just after Kalamazoo's did. Battle Creek's ads have reached over 330,000 people with visual, entertaining, and informative messages about the importance of groundwater.

Campaign Success

Like most public education, it is difficult to directly measure the success of the movie theater

ads. Since the website name was included in all the ads, the most readily available measurement is the number of website visitors. The average number of website visits throughout the ad campaign period has increased by 50 percent. However, the numbers have been somewhat erratic and difficult to directly correlate with just the movie ads.

We do know that a large number of people are viewing the ads. In April 2006, a public survey was given to 2,000 randomly selected Kalamazoo County residents about water-related issues. Of the 28 percent that responded, 10 percent reported that they viewed a water resources protection educational movie theater ad. Perhaps the funniest story about the effectiveness of the ads was shared by the Environmental Program Coordinator for the City of Battle Creek. A few guys were overheard at a local bar discussing the Kalamazoo River and one stated that the river was the source of their drinking water. A second chimed in, saying that was not true; they drank groundwater. A third asked how he knew, and the second replied, "I saw it in an ad at the movie theater!"

In conclusion, it is apparent that the movie ads have been a success. They reached large numbers and different types of audiences, resulted in significant positive interest, increased website visits, and have been enjoyable for the City of Kalamazoo's and hopefully other WHP Committees. It is important to note however that due to the costs of the project, the paper napkin idea probably never would have made it to the big screen if it were not for the WHP grant funding from MDEQ. ♦