



THE

LITTLE DIGGER

MINNESOTA ONSITE WASTEWATER ASSOCIATION

A Quarterly Publication

Summer 2025 - Vol. 40, Issue 2

Plan a Long Weekend and Attend the August 8th, 2025 Soils Seminar Event in Cook, MN!



**Join us for the annual MOWA Summer Soils class
and earn 6 CEUs approved by MPCA for Soils!**

MOWA is excited to partner once again with the University of Minnesota OSTP to provide this opportunity. Come for a great day of learning with Dan Wheeler, Stacey Feser, Dave Gustafson, and Cody Robinson (MPCA).

Seating is limited to 50 people so register today! This event is sponsored by Preferred Pump.

The class will be hosted in Cook, Minnesota. Come make a weekend of it and earn some CEUs too. Cook serves as the gateway to the western half of Lake Vermilion in St. Louis County.

When: August 8, 2025 at 8:00 AM

Where: City of Cook Community Center,
510 Gopher Drive, Cook, MN 55723

Register: <https://mowa-mn.com/soils-seminar/>

More information is located on the website for lodging accommodations. Be sure to make those soon as this location is desirable for fishing this time of year ■

Tony Ruppert Scholarship Program Taking Applications; Deadline for Submissions is Oct. 15th!

Every year, MOWA sponsors the Tony Ruppert Scholarship Program for students attending higher education. This scholarship is reserved for applicants that are either a MOWA Member, MOWA Member employee, or MOWA Member's child, sibling, grandchild, niece, or nephew. It is a great way for the association to give back to our next generation.

Applicants can view the rules of the scholarship on the website and see the requirements. All applications are submitted online.

<https://mowa-mn.com/scholarships/>

Three scholarships were awarded in 2024 for \$1,000 each. Don't miss this opportunity! Deadline to apply is October 15, 2025 ■

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Register NOW for August 8th Summer Soils Seminar at www.mowa-mn.com!

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A Message from the MOWA President

President's Update: Leading Together in 2025

by Rick Viita, President of the MOWA Board of Directors

Dear MOWA Members,

It's an honor to serve as your President after 25 years in the onsite wastewater industry. Looking back, I wish I'd joined MOWA's efforts earlier—this field has given me so much, and now I'm all in to give back. I'm calling on you, whether you're new to the trade or a seasoned pro, to jump in and help shape our industry's future.

The Little Digger is more than a newsletter—it's a reflection of your Minnesota Onsite Wastewater Association, where we share knowledge, tackle challenges, and build a stronger community. Together, we're protecting Minnesota's health and environment through smarter wastewater management.

*With the pace ramping up, let's keep safety first:
slow down when needed, double-check your work,
and get everyone home safe.*

As we grind through another busy season, I salute every installer, designer, inspector, maintainer, service provider, and regulator. Your work makes a difference. With the pace ramping up, let's keep safety first: slow down when needed, double-check your work, and get everyone home safe. And let's not forget our spouses and families who support us through these long days—take a moment to show them your appreciation.

Here's what's on tap for MOWA:

- **Soils Workshop:** Join us August 8, 2025, in Cook, St. Louis County—my hometown! I'm thrilled to learn from the University of Minnesota soil scientists and refresh our perc test training. Details at mowa-mn.com.
- **25th Annual MOWA Conference:** Mark your calendars for February 3–5, 2026, at The DECC in Duluth. Expect world-class training, networking, and inspiration. Registration details are coming soon at mowa-mn.com.
- **Mentorship Program:** We're launching a new initiative to pair experienced pros with newcomers, fostering growth and collaboration across our industry.
- **Sewage Land Application Solutions:** We're working together to develop safe, sustainable practices for Minnesota's unique needs.

Your voice drives MOWA forward. Join a committee, share your ideas, or drop us a line at info@mowa-mn.com. Let's make this industry stronger together.

Thank you for your grit and dedication. I'm proud to lead this community and can't wait to see you in Cook and Duluth! ■

Rick Viita
President of MOWA

This is a quarterly publication of the Minnesota Onsite Wastewater Association.
Editor: Tammy Trantham, Email: mowaexec@gmail.com

The articles printed in the publication do not necessarily reflect the opinion of this organization. Readers are encouraged to respond to the articles with their own points-of-view. We welcome industry-related comments or articles. Information or inquiries should be sent or made to any of the following:

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Ph: 612.361.9629 www.mowa-mn.com

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MOWA Member Benefit—Ask Me Anything Webinars

MOWA Ask Me Anything Webinars Available in Real Time and On-Demand

Did you know that MOWA started a new member benefit in 2025? We are hosting Ask Me Anything webinars with special topics. A speaker presents about 20 minutes on a topic and then we open it up for Q&A with the group. We've held a few and more are being scheduled.

MOWA members can access the recorded webinars at anytime through the NOWRA Learning Platform. You have to create a profile and MOWA has to activate your membership, but once you do this, you can view any of the completed webinars. Check out more information on our website here: <https://mowa-mn.com/ask-me-anything-webinars/>

Please note that no CEs are offered for these events.

Upcoming webinars are being scheduled! Summer is busy so we don't have many now but hope to have more in the fall.

UPCOMING ASK-ME-ANYTHING WEBINAR:

July 14 at 12:00 PM

Topic: *Change of Ownership for Businesses*

Speaker: Jimmy Lipps, MPCA

Description: Changes happen in every business, and a common one is a change of ownership. This discussion will help attendees to understand whether or not a new SSTS Business License is required for such a change, what information and forms to provide to the MPCA when such a change occurs, and what other obligations a licensee may have to fulfil when carrying out a change of ownership.

ON-DEMAND PAST RECORDED WEBINARS:

Topic: *Understanding the Site and Soils – How do we make this system fit?*

Speaker: Pete Otterness, University of Minnesota – OSTP

Topic: *SSTS Insurance and Bonding Licensing Requirements*

Speaker: Nate Overland, Overland Insurance Agency

Topic: *Ready for Anything: The Tools Every Wastewater Service Provider Needs*

Speaker: Lucas Caldwell, Septic Check ■

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A New Health Insurance Option for MOWA Members!

MOWA Member Benefit Feature— Apollo Health Insurance

As a member of MOWA, you also have benefits from being a member of NOWRA (National Onsite Wastewater Recycling Association). There are many benefits to being a member of both associations and you can view these on our website and NOWRA's website.

One of the newest benefits added in the last year is an option for health insurance for you and your company. It's one of the best ways to keep employees happy is to provide excellent benefits. Why not check the pricing and benefits with Apollo Insurance and see if they can help you out?

Contact information for Apollo Insurance is in the facing ad on Page 8.

To see your full list of MOWA Member benefits, visit our website here: <https://mowa-mn.com/membership/>

To see your full list of NOWRA Member benefits, visit their website here: <https://www.nowra.org/join/membership-benefits/> ■

SAVE THE DATE! 2026 MOWA Winter Convention

**MOWA is busily planning
the 2026 Winter Convention
for February 2-3, 2026.**

The event will be hosted at the Duluth Entertainment Event Center (DECC). Mark your calendars and registration will open this fall. The agenda is currently being organized.

If you have any suggestions on speakers, please contact MOWA with this information.

The event will offer several CEs and the annual Roe-D-Hoe event. In addition, we always have a large selection of silent auction items for our scholarship fundraiser! Don't miss this great event that brings together professionals for networking and knowledge.

MOWA will have a room block available at Canal Park Lodge. Details will be posted on the website once they are open. See you in February 2026! ■

2025

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October 19-22, 2025
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[NOWRA.org](https://www.nowra.org) | [ohioonsite.org](https://www.ohioonsite.org)



Minnesota professional broadens NOWRA Board

Minnesota Pumper Finds Help in National Association

Brian Koski finds next level networking and educational opportunities with his recent NOWRA involvement

This article was published in the June 2025 print issue of the Onsite Installer as "Going National," State Snapshot, and online at onsiteinstaller.com



Brian Koski, (Photo: https://www.onsiteinstaller.com/uploads/images/photo-brian_koski)

Name, age, and title or job description : Brian Koski, 40, owner, Chief Executive Officer

Business name and location: Septic Check, Milaca, Minnesota

Services we offer: We design, inspect, install, pump and repair septic systems. We do line-cleaning. We are also service providers for advanced pretreatment systems.

Years in the industry: 21. When I was 19, I became the first employee for the company. I became an owner a few years

later, then sole owner about 12 years ago. The founders were friends of the family. I got an internship with them while I was in college. I went to school for water and wastewater quality and got my Wastewater Operator License.

Association involvement: I've been a member of the Minnesota Onsite Wastewater Association (MOWA) since I got started. I was on the Board for years and President twice. In 2024, I was nominated for the National Onsite Wastewater Recycling Association (NOWRA) Board and was voted in last fall.

Benefits of belonging to NOWRA: I'm still wrapping my head around what NOWRA is working on, but I went to their conference in 2024. I noticed that our state organization attracts the best of the best, and NOWRA seems to do the same thing at the national level. It's really nice to have the level of knowledge and expertise. The classes and topics are exciting to me, just being different from what I'm used to at the MOWA level. The quality is really good. I've always enjoyed the networking side of associations, being able to talk to people, gain knowledge, build relationships, learn and get advice. That's always been beneficial to me. And just keeping a pulse on the industry is helpful, seeing where things are going regulation-wise, new ways of doing things, new technology.

Biggest issue facing NOWRA right now: NOWRA went through a strategic planning process in 2024. I wasn't involved in that, but I'm seeing what they created and I know everybody on the Board who went through that process said it was really helpful to distill down what they want to focus on over the next two or three years. A big part of NOWRA has been a focus on online learning. That continues to be the case and there will be more time and investment put into that. On the regulation side of things, \$50 million a year has been appropriated to our industry at the federal level so they're working on getting that distributed out to the state level so it can actually be used. And they continue to build the membership and create value for the members.

Our crew includes: We have 25 people on our team. I'm a firm believer that our people are our most important asset, and our team is awesome. I worked really hard at building that team. We work in various areas of the septic industry and have managers for each department. We have created a really strong leadership team, which has been instrumental in our growth and ability to serve our customers. I couldn't do it without any of them.

Typical day on the job: I'm involved in decision-making, financial oversight and project management of the larger complex installation projects. I help solve problems, run

NOWRA Profile - Brian Koski, Continued on Page 9

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NOWRA Profile - Brian Koski, Continued from Page 8

meetings, do big picture planning. All our marketing is done internally so I help facilitate that, coming up with ideas and so on.

The job I'll never forget: Early in my career when I was in my early 20s, we had some staffing changes and I had to take over leading our installation crew. We had been awarded our biggest job to that point for a resort and golf course — a 48,000 gpd system with gravel filters and pretreatment. The customer was adamant that we could only build it in the winter so we wouldn't wreck the golf course. We worked in December and January in the snow and below-freezing temperatures. I had to figure out a way to build structures to heat areas to keep them from freezing. We had to build a couple of big gravel filters with rubber liners in them. My uncle owned a concrete business and taught me how to build shelter-in areas. We covered the whole gravel filter and heated it so we could work on it without damaging anything. Looking back, it was one of the best experiences from a learning perspective, but I would never do it again.

My favorite piece of equipment: We always invest heavily in good quality equipment. I don't like downtime, so I want to make sure our guys have the tools they need and can rely on. We use Milwaukee tools that are awesome, and Crust Busters tank agitators. Sometimes it's the little tools that make a hard job easier. It keeps morale up when you have something you can just grab and know it's going to work.

Most challenging site I've worked on: We've done several island projects in the winter where we had to drive over the ice to get there. And we did a project last year at a mobile home park that had sandy, gravelly soil, a very small site. We set seven large tanks with a crane which lifted the tanks off a semitruck and went over mobile homes and trees to get them into the right spots. We did all this while keeping the existing system active. The edges of our excavation site were mobile homes. There was a lot of dirt to remove with very little access.

Oops, this didn't work out as planned: A restaurant owner needed some work done. We didn't feel good about him right off the bat, but we did it anyway. It ended up he only paid us half so we lost quite a bit of money on it. So that was a lesson that we should have listened to our gut. Another thing is, I sometimes get distracted by side projects that aren't really in line with our company goals. And, thirdly, we've spent tons of money on advertising over the years that didn't really amount to anything.

The craziest question or most insightful comment from a customer: I read our reviews and pay attention to what customers say, good or bad, just to learn. It's insightful. But we get the crazy questions, too — *"I heard throwing a dead chicken in my tank is good to get the bacteria going,"* or people who brag about never pumping their tank, or somebody told them they didn't have to do anything to maintain their system, or, *"Why can't I just pump this out on the ground?"*

If I could change one industry regulation, it would be: I'd like to see more consistent application of existing regulations between the different counties and jurisdictions. They all do things a little differently which is challenging and frustrating.

Best piece of small business advice I've heard or came up with:

You, as the leader or owner of a company, are the roadblock—meaning your team or company will only grow to the extent you do. So you have to have some awareness and be open to change, work on yourself, set your ego aside a little bit. You have to be honest and willing to consider that you're the problem, not other people.

If I wasn't working in the wastewater industry, I would like to:

If I could do anything, I'd be spending time outdoors in the woods. I'm an avid bow hunter and love being in the woods.

Crystal ball time – This is my outlook for the wastewater industry:

I'm positive about it and continue to be excited about the future. There is a lot of opportunity if you look for it. When I started, everybody was over twice my age. Many have retired or soon will. So I've noticed more of the next generation coming up and taking over. The mindset shifts with that—a willingness to embrace new technology and adopt new ways of doing things. It has always been challenging finding the right people to hire, and that doesn't seem to be going away. It's a challenge but maybe an opportunity as well. And I think it would be good to see a continuation of promoting professionalism in our industry and treating it as a trade instead of the black sheep of trades so that it's a career people can be attracted to ■

This article first appeared in the June 2025 print issue of the Onsite Installer magazine, published by COLE Publishing Inc., www.onsiteinstaller.com. It is reprinted by permission.



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UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA

Septic Smart Week is Sept. 15-19, 2025

MOWA to partner with Uof MN OSTP for Septic Smart Week Webinar!



For the second year, MOWA is promoting a free webinar for homeowners to join during Septic Smart Week to learn about their SSTs. We hope that you and your business will help us promote this event and get the word out about registration. The goal is to help homeowners understand the importance of maintaining their systems and how they work. We will have experts on the webinar to answer any of their questions.

When: September 16

Time: 6:30 PM – 8:00 PM

How: Webinar through Zoom

Registration Information can be found here: <https://mowa-mn.com/septic-smart/>

There is also a link on the website to take you to EPA's website where you can download all sorts of information or items to help your business promote Septic Smart Week on social media ■

SepticSmart Week is an annual event that occurs the third week of September. It is sponsored by the U.S. EPA with the goal of raising public awareness about the challenges faced by many homeowners, local environmental groups, county health departments and local governments from improperly maintained or failing septic systems.

EPA's SepticSmart program aims to provide materials and resources to increase homeowner education on septic systems and promote awareness in caring for them.

EPA's online resources may be downloaded, printed and shared as needed and can be found at <https://www.epa.gov/septic/septicsmart-education-materials>



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Note: Your MOWA Membership includes one NOWRA membership

Memberships are based on calendar year - After July 1st, new members pay \$140-individual / \$190-business or gov't groups for remainder of 2025

Individual/Group Contact: This person will be listed as the NOWRA member on the Septic Locator website. They will be listed first in all MOWA publications. Please print clearly.

1st Member _____ Company Name _____
Address _____ City/State/Zip _____
Title _____ Phone _____ Mobile/800# _____ Fax _____
Email _____ Website _____ County _____

Circle the counties you work in: Needed for Directory and website.

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Benton5	Dakota19	Kandiyohi34	Morrison49	Redwood64	Wabasha79
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Blue Earth7	Douglas21	Koochiching36	Murray51	Rice66	Waseca81
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Carlton9	Fillmore23	Lake38	Nobles53	Roseau68	Watsonwan83
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Address _____ City/State/Zip _____
Phone _____ Mobile/800# _____ Fax _____ Email _____

(Please list additional business/government group members on separate sheet with complete contact information.)

Publications: Would you prefer receiving 'Little Digger' newsletters via ... ☐ Regular Mail ☐ Electronically
We currently send one publication per address to business/government groups. Contact the MOWA office if you'd like additional copies.

Additional NOWRA Memberships: MOWA membership fees include one NOWRA membership per company/organization. List names of members who want additional NOWRA memberships here: Cost - \$40 per person.

2) _____ 3) _____ 4) _____ 5) _____

Payment:

(Please print) MOWA Membership \$ _____ + Add'l NOWRA Memberships = Amount: \$ _____
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MOWA, 5865 Neal Ave N, PMB #341, Stillwater, MN 55082 Phone: 612.361.9629

NOTE: Dues payable to MOWA are not deductible as a charitable contribution but may be deductible as an ordinary and necessary business expense.

MOWA estimates that 10% of your MOWA dues are used for governmental affairs issues and therefore are not deductible.

MISSION: Promoting professionalism in the onsite wastewater industry



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It's Never Too Late To Get Involved in MOWA!

As a professional organization, MOWA is always looking for members who want to contribute by joining a Committee. Here are some options as well as the person to contact if you want to join or need more information:

Convention Committee

Chairperson: Open

Membership Committee

Co-Chairpersons: Kurt Christopherson and Travis Johnson

Scholarship Committee

Chairperson: Ryan Lashinski

Legislative Committee

Chairperson: Lori Ende

Mentorship Committee

Chairperson: Jake Bell

Land Application Committee

Chairperson: Keith Valento



Come grow with us ...

Our membership includes: Installers, Pumpers, Designers, Professionals, Inspectors Engineers, Soil Scientists, Operator/ Maintenance Providers, Government Regulators, Educators, Manufacturers, Suppliers, Students and any others interested in Minnesota's wastewater industry.

Benefits of Membership Include:

- Legislative watchdog following local and national industry issues
- Ability to influence state and national rules & policy
- Substantial business insurance savings
- Ongoing education
- Free directory and web site listings
- Annual Winter Convention
- Summer Soils Seminar
- Access to Association logos to distinguish your company from non-member companies
- Opportunity to join and participate in Association committees
- Ongoing direct electronic communications regarding current local and national issues and events
- Social events and networking activities
- Discounted fees for MOWA events
- Competitive advantages through enhanced exposure to fellow industry professionals
- Receive the Little Digger newsletter,
- Reliable information about the industry
- Association office and staff resources