

# Getting To Know You: Steve Cook

Public Works Director, City of Cape Girardeau



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Cape Girardeau's Steve Cook is as highly regarded as he is humble. Nearing 40 years of service to the City's 38,000 residents, Cook's resume is a lengthy list of accolades and accomplishments. Cook recently took the helm of the Public Works Department in June 2015, superseding former director Tim Gramling.

As Gramling prepared to leave the City, Cook was serving as the assistant public works director and was planning to retire. However, he was the default interim director choice and it didn't take long for city management to ask Steve to hold off on his retirement plans.

"We were at a critical time with a lot of important projects and new processes," said Cape Girardeau City Manager Scott Meyer. "We had to find someone with a high

level of knowledge and experience, but more importantly, someone who the employees could trust immediately."

At that time, the Department was still wrapping up a major construction project and gearing up for another. The new wastewater treatment facility had just come online and work to configure dryers and other details was ongoing. The department had also just partnered with Republic Services to build a \$3.8 million City-owned transfer station that will increase material processing from 100 tons of waste per day to 180.

Steve started his Cape career as a wastewater laboratory technician in 1977 and gathered several recognitions as he ascended the ranks through wastewater, to environmental services coordinator and finally department management. His work led to, among other awards, the 1998 Governors Pollution Prevention Award for the Combined Sewer Removal Projects and the Recycling Program. His induction into the Missouri Water Environment Association's "Golden Manhole Society" in 2002 sums it up well as he was recognized for "significant effort over an extensive period of time, positively contributing to the betterment of individuals associated with collection system."

The department is especially honored by the 2002 William D. Hatfield Award from the Water Environment Federation. Recipients are recognized for "outstanding

performance and professionalism in the operation of a wastewater treatment facility."

With the full-time employee equivalent count hovering right around 86 since the 1990s, Cook credits each of those Cape Girardeau Public Works employees with every success along the way. In just the last few years, the department added automated trash collection and single-stream recycling, a new wastewater facility, a new transfer station, expanded leaf pickup and street repair programs, and passed multiple tax initiatives to fund some of the work. Managing all of this growth and change has been all about having the right attitude.

"We're here to serve," said Cook. He says employees are most productive when they have the tools and training to get the job done, and they're empowered to make decisions and recommend improvements. "We have opened the lines of communication with all city divisions," Cook added. "The flow of knowledge and information back and forth has benefitted the City as a whole."

Only two people currently working for the city of Cape Girardeau have served its citizens longer, making Cook the "most senior" member of the City's department heads. His experience brings historic reference and a breadth and depth of knowledge to the city leadership team. Most importantly, the City appreciates his all-in support for the employees and their ideas. □



**Cape Girardeau Wastewater Treatment Facility**