Say ‘Hello’ to Fred Sickels the Sections’ May Spotlight Member! Fred has been a member of the Association since 2013. And, he is active on the Strategic Planning Committee, Water Utility Council, Lead & Copper Advisory Committee, and the Infrastructure Management Committee. Fred had a 35-year career with the NJDEP from which he retired as Director, Division of Water Supply & Geoscience in 2015. Currently, Fred is the sole proprietor of FASickels Environmental Management, LLC. The firm provides technical and administrative support to drinking water utilities and other water related industries.

During Fred’s time at NJDEP he received written recognition for his work on the Superstorm Sandy Response, Process Re-Engineering, and the Well Driller & Pump Installer Advisory Board. Additionally, he served as the Commissioner’s representative to the Delaware River Basin Commission and served as Chair for NJ Water Authority meetings.

Why did you decide to go into the field of water?

Early in my career I was involved in emergency response to hazardous substance discharges and cleanup of contaminated sites. Much of the work involved protecting drinking water sources, both surface and groundwater. The experience was my first exposure to the importance of safe drinking water to the health and economy of the State. After a few years, I was tasked by the Assistant Commissioner overseeing the Water Allocation and Safe Drinking Water Programs to eliminate a backlog of approximately 350 water allocation permits that had grown over several years. Serving as Bureau Chief we were able to eliminate the backlog in about a year. After we eliminated the backlog, I was assigned permanently to the Division of Water Supply. I found the work interesting, important and challenging. Eventually I was promoted to Assistant Director responsible for the Water Allocation, Well Construction, and Safe Drinking Water Engineering Programs. The introduction to water treatment, distribution and permitting, along with the opportunity to work and engage with some very knowledgeable engineers, became a highlight in my career. As Director, the addition of the Safe Drinking Water program to my areas of responsibility further enhanced my knowledge and enjoyment of the field. One of the best decisions we made was to bring the NJ Geologic Survey into the Division. Being closely involved with the geologists on a daily basis was a real pleasure. So, while I didn’t actually “decide” to get into the drinking water field, I was fortunate to get the initial assignment because it opened opportunities to make a difference in a very important field.

How did you become a volunteer for AWWA? What motivates you to be active in the Section?

When I decided to retire from the NJDEP, I felt it was time for me to explore other avenues where I might be able to make a bigger contribution to Safe Drinking Water. I really enjoyed the work and wanted to stay involved. Participating on the various AWWA-NJ committees provided an opportunity to interact with experts in the drinking water field, enhance my expertise, and most importantly, contribute to solutions to the many challenges facing the industry. I realized while at NJDEP there were many very smart, competent people working in drinking water, but I didn’t realize just how many until becoming involved with the committees.

How long have you been an AWWA member and what have you gotten from your membership?

I became a member in 2013. Why did I wait so long? Initially, being in a program that is regulatory, I was concerned about the appearance of conflict. But as I learned more about the AWWA I found it provided valuable training opportunities and information which contributed to the growth of my expertise and
competence in the job. Now in my current position, I use the resources AWWA provides to continue that growth and stay current on developments in the field.

**Hobbies and outside interests?**

I have a love for the outdoors that developed early on with my dad. My frequent bass fishing trips to Lake Champlain remain a major enjoyment in my life. I got into horses when my daughter started to ride as a young girl. She became very competent as a rider. I still have horses and they are a big part of our family. I don’t do as much riding as I once did, they and I are getting older, but taking care of them is a lot of fun. Winston Churchill has been credited with “there is something about the outside of a horse, that’s good for the inside of a man”. Whether he said it or not, I agree. Our love of horses takes us to Chincoteague, VA many times a year to visit the wild ponies on Assateague Island. One of which we have on our farm today. I also love taking walks with my two beagles, Lulu and Patsy. No matter how lousy the day is going, these two will always raise your spirits. I also enjoy reading biographies of major historical figures and events.

**What legacy would you like to leave behind?**

Not sure I am important enough to leave behind any legacy, but being a good husband and father would be first on the list. Professionally I hope I’m remembered as one who was open to new ideas to solve a problem and was able to make decisions.