

Good to the last drop:

How Texas-based WaterLogic is conserving water and saving clients money



Charles Racusin
Founder, Chief Executive Officer

BY BRANDI SMITH



Texas has always had a complicated relationship with water. It seems we're constantly in a bind; there's either too much of it or not enough. As a result, water rates aren't just rising, they're skyrocketing. According to Circle of Blue, those rates have increased 55 percent since 2010 alone.

That can generate substantial issues for just about every individual and every industry, but it's especially problematic for companies that rely heavily on landscaping, such as property managers and developers.

"Water is one of our most precious resources," says Airia Development Company's Lucy Robertson. "We might not think that when we see so much of it falling out of the sky, but water is increasingly expensive."

Airia Development Company is the brains behind Aliana, one of the largest and fastest-growing master-planned communities in Fort Bend County. With 2,000 acres to oversee, water management is of utmost importance. That's why, Robertson says, Aliana's homeowners association and MUD district started working with WaterLogic, a Houston-based water and irrigation management company.

"We've saved 65 million gallons of water over the past three years. That is a significant amount of water," says Robertson. "Not just that, it's a significant amount of monetary savings for the residents in the community and it shows we care about this valuable resource."

The roots of WaterLogic date back to 1972 when its founder, Charles Racusin, started an award-winning commercial landscape company. He noticed just how much water was being wasted on many commercial properties, spilling down the street instead of being used properly.

"For decades, irrigation controllers were installed on commercial properties and basically were nothing more than glorified kitchen timers. They used someone's non-educated guess for when to run the system and how much water to apply, resulting in a tremendous amount of wasted water and wasted money for the property," Racusin says.

We've all seen what he calls "dumb controllers," which are arbitrarily set to water at certain times for a certain number of days each week. Racusin knew there had to be a better option out there and began looking into smart-water technology, which could instead operate on current weather data and have the potential for two-way communication. It was in 2003 that he founded WaterLogic, adding his "secret sauce" to the industry.

"Major developers spend millions of dollars on their landscaping. So to leave water management up to just a 'yard man' isn't the smartest or best thing to do," says Racusin. "We're another set of eyes on their property -- a professional set of eyes. That's all we do day in, and day out."

When WaterLogic starts working with a client, the first step is a complimentary, no-cost analysis. That way, a property owner or manager can easily learn what the potential savings opportunities are at their property.

"We go through their irrigation systems. We locate all their controllers and then we see what the settings are. We evaluate the age of those controllers and complete a total inventory analysis. Then we come back to the client with a full report," Racusin explains.

The report details what's working, what's not and includes the client's projected return on investment,

which Racusin says can happen as fast as four months.

With the green light, WaterLogic goes to work, not just setting the controllers, but having its well-trained staff constantly monitoring the client's properties and irrigation needs so nothing is getting over- or underwatered.

"They end up having a healthier landscape because they're getting the right amount of water instead of too much," says Racusin.

That remote monitoring is done by utilizing the controllers' two-way communication capabilities.

"If there's a problem that exists on your property, we'll get an automatic alert and then we'll be able to assess that and address it," he says.

Racusin offers an example of a client who doubted WaterLogic's responsiveness. In the middle of August, one of the company's water managers noticed an Austin company's irrigation system was off.

"We all know Austin. When it's hot in the middle of August, you'd better have your irrigation system on," Racusin says. "We contacted the property manager and explained that the system was off. He said, 'Oh, no. The landscaper was out there planting some additional plants and he must've turned off the system and forgot to turn it back on. I'm at O'Hare Airport in Chicago. What can I do?'"

For WaterLogic, the answer was simple. John O'Donnell, the company's vice president of technology, explained to the client that he could turn the system back on -- and that's exactly what he did, from WaterLogic's office in Houston.

"Those plants survived and that client is definitely a fan now, a big believer," Racusin says.

Now his company helps a list of clients that reads like a Who's Who of American businesses across 19 states. In Houston alone, WaterLogic boasts more than 2,500 installations, including several at Johnson Development's Sienna Plantation, which Racusin calls one of the leaders in adopting smart-water technology.

"Years ago, they saw that there was an alternative resource for water conservation controllers. It may have been more expensive, but it was the best at the time and they implemented that," says Racusin.

"It's been a terrific experience working with the WaterLogic team for our water conservation needs," says Troy Goodell, operations manager for Sienna Plantation Associations.

The 10,800-acre development in Fort Bend County includes 600 irrigated acres of common space. Goodell says partnering with WaterLogic has proved valuable enough, the development is about to sign off on a \$400,000 system upgrade.

"We have a pretty good deal on our water, but we want to make sure we are showing the residents that we're not wasting water," Goodell says. "When it's raining, we don't have irrigation running. We're also finding leaks and shutting systems down remotely to save time and money at the end of the day."

Racusin also speaks highly of Westheimer Lakes, the HOA which brought WaterLogic on to manage water conservation on the 592-acre project along Houston's Grand Parkway Corridor.

"WaterLogic's technology is better than just your average water controller. Not only does it have a rain gauge, it has some smarts to it. It has a live monitoring component that is very beneficial, making sure not only of what's going on on a day-to-day basis, but a predictive model to help them make sure that we're not watering right before it rains. It did cost us money to put it in there, but we've saved more than \$250,000," says Randy Carter, director of the HOA and president of Fort Bend County Municipal Utility District #142. "We've also saved more than 69 million gallons of water that would otherwise just be dripping down the street. I'm very impressed with the WaterLogic system."

The MUD is still expanding, according to Carter, and as more developers come on board, he says WaterLogic will be implemented in those districts as well. The reasoning behind that isn't just economic, though.



"There's a social responsibility element as well. Being able to conserve water is really important to us," Carter explains. "I originally got involved just trying to locate somebody who can help us. But when I started talking to WaterLogic, I realized Charlie's a huge champion for water conservation. He has a good team that helps me out and answers questions when they come up. Overall we're pleased and impressed with their service."

Though many clients do appreciate that, Racusin acknowledges it really comes down to money at the end of the day for other clients. If they're spending their capital on something, they want to know it will be worth it.

"Because we apply the right amount of water at the right time, it saves our clients 40 percent of their water and 40 percent of their money," Racusin points out.

That extends not just to master-planned communities, but office buildings, retail centers, hospitals and essentially any other organization looking to conserve water.

"I would anticipate that the need for our services will continue to grow at a pretty significant pace based upon the scarcity of our water resources," says Racusin.

For more information about WaterLogic or to schedule a complimentary water management analysis, call (877) 322-4222 or email info@WaterLogic-Texas.com. ■