



TO: Chairman and Board Members
THRU: Mark Foree, General Manager
FROM: Kim Mazeres, Customer Relations Director
DATE: December 2, 2013
SUBJECT: **Report regarding Ombudsman activities from December, 2012 through November, 2013 and request for Board direction and possible authorization for the General Manager to renew the Ombudsman Contract with Joanne Stralla for Calendar Year 2014**

Summary

The Board of Directors has asked Staff to bring the Ombudsman contract back to them for review annually. Ms. Joanne Stralla has been TMWA's Ombudsman for the past five years. Staff has enjoyed an excellent and productive working relationship with Ms. Stralla in solving customer issues during this time and asks the Board for their direction concerning the continuation of her contract with TMWA to provide Ombudsman services.

Background

On November 1, 2005, pursuant to Board direction, Truckee Meadows Water Authority entered into a Professional Services Agreement with Don Rhoden to provide Ombudsman services for TMWA customers. This contract was renewed annually, until Mr. Rhoden's resignation in late 2008. In December of 2008, TMWA entered in to a contract with Joanne Stralla, following Ms. Stralla's appointment to the Ombudsman position by the Board in November, 2008. Last December the Board renewed Ms. Stralla's contract for 2013. A copy of her contract is *Attachment #1* to this report.

Ombudsman Stralla has prepared a summary of her past year's work for TMWA, which is *Attachment #2*. (I have modified this report to remove customer names, addresses, phone numbers, and account numbers.) Over the past 12 months TMWA has paid Ms. Stralla \$2,400 for services rendered. This is a minimal expenditure for the advantage to our customers of having an independent Ombudsman to assist them. As the monthly amount paid to the Ombudsman has never been adjusted, I would recommend increasing it to \$225 a month.

12-11-13 BOARD Agenda Item 14.1

| <u>DATE OF INQUIRY</u> | <u>NATURE OF INQUIRY</u> | <u>ACCOUNT</u> | <u>STATUS</u> | <u>STATUS DATE</u> | <u>TMWA OWNER</u> | <u>FINAL RESOLUTION</u> |
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| 12/3/12 | ██████████ Riverbend Mobile Home Park | | complete | | Bill -- Engineering | ██████████ wanted to coordinate with TMWA As to what should be done to avoid damage if the river should flood. I returned her call but she had already spoken with Bill in Engineering. Her phone # ██████████ |
| 12/4/12 | ██████████ | | complete | | Kim Mazerres | Customer received a letter from American Water Resources offering insurance on the waterline from the street to his house. After many attempts I finally got a hold of him. I told him that this was a legitimate company and that he should check with his home owners insurance company to see if additional coverage is something that he should consider. He called me back and said that water damage would be covered by his homeowners but any damage to the pipe to his house would not. He was going think about getting the additional coverage. |
| 12/8/12 | ████████████████████ | | complete | | | ██████████ received the same letter from American Water Resources. Gave her the same information. |
| 12/27/12 | ██████████ City of Carlin | | complete | | Kim Mazerres | ██████████ had a question regarding Security deposits. How they are calculated for both residential and commercial. |
| 12/27/12 | ██████████ | | | | | This customer is an ongoing problem. She just called to let me know how rude everyone at TMWA is to her and that they were also rude to her priest. She said she is going to do something about it. |
| 1/8/13 | ██████████ | | complete | | | ██████████ called to get info regarding the cost of water at ██████████ Sparks. This address is serviced by Washoe County Water. Referred her there. |

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| 1/9/13 | [REDACTED] | complete | Andy Gebhardt | <p>[REDACTED] called to complain about his November bill. The bill was for 26000 gallons \$90.52. He said Neechie came out to check and said she thought he had a leak but none was found. He waited to see what his Dec bill was before he called. He said his Dec bill is for 2000 gals \$23.47. He claims he did not find any leaks. Andy gave him a \$21.00 per the normal policy in these cases. Dale was not happy. He said he might go to Small Claims Court.</p> |
| 1/29/13 | [REDACTED] | complete | Marci Westlake | <p>Never spoke with him. He left a message threatening all kinds of things because he was charged a deposit. I called him back but he informed me he was on his way to TMWA office and would get back to me. He never did.</p> |
| 2/4/13 | [REDACTED] | complete | Marci Westlake | <p>[REDACTED] pays his bill each month through bill pay at Great Basin Credit Union. He has to pay on the first of the month when he receives his retirement check. This last month he incurred a late charge. He contacted the credit union and they told him they have not been able to establish a ACH relationship with TMWA whereby The payments would be more timely. He asked if his due date could be moved to a later date. Marci contacted customer and told him they are working on a solution with the credit union. His due date was changed to the 20th of the month. I followed up with Mr. [REDACTED] and he was extremely pleased.</p> |
| 2/7/13 | [REDACTED] | complete | Kim Mazeres Marci Westlake | <p>[REDACTED] called and told me that Mike Carrigan told her to call me and see if I could help her as her services had been turned off. I told her that I couldn't do anymore. We did everything we could last time she was turned off and she did not keep her agreement.</p> |

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| 2/21/13 | <p>██████████ <i>Same caller as 1/9/13</i></p> | complete | Andy Gebhardt | <p>██████████ called and wanted the name once again of the person who gave him the ridiculous credit. I gave him Andy's name and number. Last I heard Andy had not heard from him.</p> |
| 2/28/13 | <p>██████████ ██████████</p> | complete | Kim Mazereres | <p>██████████ wanted to know why we outsource our payment processing as well as our customer service. I did not feel I could answer his question properly so I referred it to Kim who called the customer back. I now have the information I need to answer should this question come up again.</p> |
| 3/1/13 | <p>██████████ River School Farms ██████████</p> | complete | Andy Gebhardt | <p>██████████ said she had been working with TMWA on an irrigation system for Hug High School. She also mentioned Reed High School. What she was asking is for a "ball park" figure as to what the rates and water bill be. Andy got back to her with the information she needed.</p> |
| 3/8/13 | <p>██</p> | complete | | <p>Customer is moving to ██████████ ██████████ in Reno and wanted service put in his name. I called customer service to contact him and found that the address is serviced by Washoe County Water Dist. Called him back with their phone number.</p> |
| 3/11/13 | <p>██████████</p> | complete | Kim Mazereres Marci Westlake | <p>Customer called, but did not leave a phone number or an address. He said he had a water bill due but he had a heart attack and is in the hospital. Marci said that he had called the call center and was told he had to pay \$50.00 in order to keep his service on. This was the remainder of his deposit. Marci was going to watch the account and make sure he doesn't get disconnected. Marci gave me his phone number ██████████ I called him and he was doing fine.</p> |

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| 3/18/13 | [REDACTED] | complete | Kim Mazeres Andy Gebhardt | <p>Customer called but he gave me a bad number. He was hard to hear and I thought his last name was Masters. Took a while to figure out who he actually was. He said he had a leak under his house that has been repaired but he received a bill for 2300.00 which he cannot pay. He was asking for assistance. Someone at his property was notified of the leak on January 10th. He used hundred of thousands of gallons of water after that time as the person didn't seem to be concerned about it. We credited his account \$981.23 which is our standard adjustment. Kim authorized a payment arrangement that is 21 months more than we normally do. A 24 mo arrangement was made with \$135.70 due now and \$50 per month for the next 2 years starting on May 1st. He actually called me back to thank me. I asked him why he didn't do something about the leak in January. He said he didn't think it was that bad!</p> |
| 3/28/13 | [REDACTED] | complete | | <p>[REDACTED] called to get service in his name I referred him to Customer Service.</p> |
| 4/10 | [REDACTED] | complete | | <p>Customer said her address was [REDACTED] she was stating that her sprinkler were turned off. I called her several times and left messages but I never heard from her.</p> |
| 4/18/13 | [REDACTED] | complete | | <p>Customer needed service established. Referred to Customer Service.</p> |
| 4/22/13 | [REDACTED] | complete | | <p>[REDACTED] left a message for me to call back. I left several messages but did not receive a call back.</p> |

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| 5/6 | [REDACTED] | complete | Kim Mazeres Debbie Sotero | Mr. [REDACTED] is opening a restaurant at the Sparks Marina. He had questions regarding commercial water rates. Once we finally spoke to him again he was actually inquiring about water rights. He was referred to Debbie Sotero who answered his questions. |
| 5/7/13 | [REDACTED] National Automobile Museum [REDACTED] | complete | Kim Mazeres Andy Gebhardt | Customer said they have been noticing a vibrating noise. After checking it out he noticed that when he can hear the noise that the main water line into the building is vibrating. He says this happens at different hours of the day. He was wondering if there was any construction going on in the area that could cause this. Andy contacted customer and thought that they possibly might have to strap the pipes down. Andy was going to look into it further. |
| 5/13/13 | [REDACTED] | complete | Kim Mazeres Necie Schlesener | Customer called stating he thought he had a water leak in his backyard and wanted to know if we can provide anything that could assist him in detecting where it is. Necie met with him on 5/15 she checked where he thought he had a leak but everything checked out okay. She did find that the front toilet was leaking. Customer was Satisfied and very complimentary of Necie. |

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| 5/29/13 | [REDACTED] | complete | Kim Mazeres Andy Gebhardt | <p>Customer called regarding a piece of equipment that was put on his water heater years ago. He thinks that it was installed by SPPCo at the time. (it was) He said there is a mist coming out of it and wanted to know if someone could look at it for him. He said he did not feel responsible as he did not ask for this piece of equipment. Andy spoke with him and told him that it was his responsibility. He called me again and was not happy with Andy's answer. After checking with Andy, I called him and told him that he is responsible but offered him the option of contacting Gary Cornwall with Claims. He said he would. He didn't seem too unhappy.</p> |
| 5/31/13 | [REDACTED] (no last name) [REDACTED] | complete | Kim Mazeres Marci Westlake | <p>[REDACTED] left me a message stating that her bill had erroneous charges on it and that she was going to the Better Business Bur. and the Water Commissioner. I called her back and received a message that this phone number is not accepting messages. Come to find out she went into the office to pay her bill because she had been CONP She did not understand how we could charge her a late charge each month on her aging balance. She said she never received a rate schedule stating that we could do that. Never heard back from her.</p> |
| 7/2/13 | [REDACTED] (City of Reno) | complete | Kim Mazeres Brent Eisert | <p>[REDACTED] called regarding Idlewild Park. She said there is graffiti on the TMWA building there. She said she has been trying to get it removed as she has been getting complaints about it. She said someone was out there but did nothing. Brent Eisert looked into the matter and the graffiti has since been removed. Also, the building is being repainted.</p> |

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| 7/17/13 | ████████ River City Plumbing 690-6793 | complete | Andy Gebhardt | ████████ called regarding a possible leak at The Kiley Ranch out in Spanish Springs. Address is ██████████. Crew went out and determined that it was not a TMWA problem. Water was not leaking at the time. Our tech thought it might be a fire service. |
| 7/30/13 | ████████ ████████ | complete | Kim Mazerres | Customer wanted to make sure tenants put service in them name. Wasn't sure if it was our service area. Called him back and confirmed they had and gave him customer service number for future questions. |
| 7/30/████ | ████████████████████ | | | ████████ called and said she had a question about her bill. Called her back several times, but never heard from her. |
| 7/31/████ | ████████████████████ | complete | | ████████ called about putting service in her name. Referred her to customer svc. |
| 8/13/13 | ████████████████████ | complete | Marci Westlake | Customer called complaining of a high bill. He said he last bill was for 38000 gallons which compared to his neighbor who has the same size house and yard was twice as much. A revue was set up but his bills have been the same for the last two years. Conservation will go over his irrigation timer and discuss conservation tips. |
| 8/14/████ | ████████████████████ Acct # ██████████ | complete | Andy Gebhardt | Customer was complaining about his usage. Spoke with Customer Service but did not like what they told him. He said he is using 25% more than last year and he has two less people living there. Lauren went out and did a review and explained to him how to read his meter and all kinds of good tips. He did not want to listen. Andy spoke with him and explained to him how the water could have been used. We will retest the meter to make sure it is working properly. Customer was satisfied with Andy's explanation. |

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| 8/22/13 | [REDACTED] | complete | Andy Gebhardt | <p>[REDACTED] called complaining about her high bill. She said she fixed all of her faucets and her toilet is not running. Andy called her and set up a reviews. I followed up with her and she was very pleased with the way this was handled. She said the two women that came out to do her review were great. Very professional and very knowledgeable. She is going to wait and see what her next bill is like.</p> |
| 9/16/13 | <p>[REDACTED] City of Fernley [REDACTED]</p> | complete | Kim Mazeris | <p>[REDACTED] wanted to know what our policy is regarding foreclosures and the resale of the properties. Is this considered a public record. Can they report the amount owing on the account. Her supervisor is [REDACTED]</p> |
| [REDACTED] 26/13 | <p>[REDACTED] Dept. of Agriculture [REDACTED]</p> | complete | Brent Eisert | <p>[REDACTED] called regarding complaints about vegetation that he said TMWA was not removing. The main complaint was from residents at [REDACTED]. The slope of concern behind the residence is on schedule to be cleaned of vegetation within the next two weeks.</p> |
| 9/27/13 | <p>[REDACTED] [REDACTED]</p> | complete | Andy Gebhardt | <p>Mr. [REDACTED] was complaining that he was trying to get his deposit refunded but he was told he did not have the proper paper work. He is getting a portion of his deposit back. He had a \$339.27 deposit credited to his account, but he owed \$151.00 in past due charges, and his final bill was \$50.52. This leaves a \$137.75 in deposit that will be refunded. The CSR he spoke with made the mistake of telling him that if he could prove he didn't live there the entire time, he could get a refund. He did provide the paperwork, so we went along with what the CSR told him and credited him an additional \$116.78 which resulted in a refund of \$254.53.</p> |

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| 10/9/13 | ██████ CTS Language Link | complete | | ██████ called to see if we could use the service that her company offers which is translation of over 240 languages. She said she would send me an email with all the information but I never heard back from her. Her phone number is ██████ |
| 10/15/13 | ████████████████████ | complete | Kim Mazeres | ██████ wanted to know what the content of fluoride is in her water. Kim informed her we do not put fluoride in the water. She asked about naturally occurring fluoride and she was referred to the lab. |
| 10/███ | ████████████████████ | complete | | Wanted to get service turned on. Referred her to Customer Service. |
| 10/31/███ | ████████████████████ | complete | Kim Mazeres | ██████ has lived at his address for several years. He is disabled and has very little income. We had added a \$110 Deposit to his account, there is no way he can pay this. We removed the deposit which left him a balance of 171.96. I reached an agreement with him to pay his monthly bill which averages \$25 plus \$10.00 each month beginning on November 15 th . He claims his home is in foreclosure. He also said he has cancer. |
| 11/13/13 | ██ | | Andy Gebhardt | Customer called and said that on October 31 st there was a crew from TMWA working on the water line in front of his house. He said they had to turn the water off for several hours. He noticed that he now has a leaking valve in his sprinkler system. He was wondering if this could be caused by the pressure of turning the water back on. Andy said he would look into it. |

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| 11/14/13 | ████████ City of Reno ██████████ | complete | Kim Mazeres Kevin Comphel | ████████ is the Sr. Code Enforcement Officer for the City of Reno. He said that TMWA is doing a construction project on Vassar St. The is apparently, a stockpile there. He said that when you have a Stockpile, the city requires that you have a Stockpile permit. Kevin Comphel spoke to ██████████ and let him that know that while this is a new business job for TMWA, it is being handled by RTC (Reno Tahoe Construction). RTC told him they have been in touch with the city and will be getting the proper permits. |
| 11/15/13 | ████████████████████ | complete | | ████████ left me a message that he was very upset with the way he was treated by customer service. I called him back twice and left messages but he did not call me back. |
| 11/27/13 | ████████████████████ | complete | | ████████ left me a message that they had an extremely high bill and wanted to it. I called them back but they had contacted customer service and they were looking into it. |