

Prepare for *opportunities* in water

BY **RON HALL** EDITOR-AT-LARGE

With challenges come opportunities. In terms of water use, the choices facing the Green Industry are that stark: discovering and capitalizing on opportunities in the face of challenges. There are many challenges.

In the short term the biggest challenge is the anemic economy, which has taken a big bite out of every industry involved with construction or property management. Then there are the millions of property owners who are just now being educated on the value of wise landscape water use.

The longer-term challenge for our industry and American landscapes is the almost certain prospect of less water, poorer quality water and more expensive water.

This will impact everybody in the Green Industry — seed producers, plant nurseries, equipment manufacturers, plant health care product providers, distributors, architects, designers, installers, irrigators, landscape maintainers and let's not forget property owners, the most important people on this list.

Opportunities right now are not so clearly defined, but they're real. These opportunities are being

capitalized upon by a so far small number of visionary and entrepreneurial Green Industry professionals who are developing and adopting ever-more-efficient products and strategies that require significantly less potable water to provide beautiful, living landscapes for their clients. How our Green Industry, as a whole, creates similar opportunities to grow the value of our services with fewer inputs will define future success. I'm confident we will. It's within our DNA to adapt and to innovate and to continue to provide our society with beautiful outdoor environments.

Indeed, those of us in the Green Industry will be looked to and called upon to take a more aggressive and vital role in conserving our nation's fresh water and preserving its quality.

Without attempting to deny the huge challenge this poses or sugar-coat the reality of today's anemic economy or the water still being needlessly wasted on too many manmade landscapes, we're making progress. This is reflected in the technology our industry can now command, some of it just now gaining wide acceptance. This includes:

- › Smart (weather-based) controllers
- › Automatic irrigation shut-off devices

- › Water-efficient rotor and spray features with pressure regulation and check valves
- › Drip irrigation that allows direct-to-plant root water devices
- › High-efficiency nozzles

But, as we all recognize, technology merely provides the tools ... and tools by themselves aren't enough. We have a big job ahead of us in educating ourselves to use these tools intelligently. This involves taking advantage of the training opportunities being made available by product suppliers, Green Industry associations and water agencies.

Beyond that — and this may be the most important piece of the puzzle — we must, as a whole, adopt a more resource-conserving approach to our services and also do a better job of educating customers.

The economy will eventually turn around and society, partly through our efforts, will come to understand water's worth to their landscapes and their pocketbooks.

It's no exaggeration to say that we're in the process of reinventing our Green Industry's future in terms of its use of water. This may be the single most important issue our industry faces in securing its growth into the next decade. **LM**