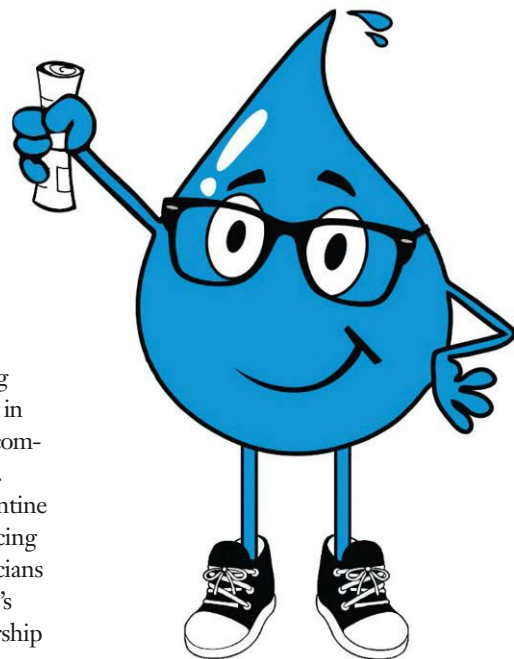


# Marketing moguls

Virginia contractor comes out on top of Smart Marketing Contest *By SARAH PFLEDDERER*



In a state where water conservation may be more of an afterthought than a leading concern, Glen Allen, Va.-based James River Grounds Management (JRGM) acknowledged the matter from a marketing standpoint better than any other contractor in the country, as seen by the Irrigation Association (IA).

The full-service company, which is 10 percent irrigation, won the contractor category of the IA's 2013 Smart Marketing Contest.

In its fourth year, the contest recognizes irrigation professionals who most creatively and efficiently promote water conservation within their companies and to water end-users during Smart Irrigation Month in July.

JRGM pulled out a marketing tactic it had seen success with in the past to get its community pepped about its campaign: Creating a mascot.

Kelly Valentine, sales and marketing administrator, designed Drip, a mascot in the form of a raindrop, who guided the company through Smart Irrigation Month.

Spearheading the campaign, Valentine kicked it off with a blog post introducing JRGM's team of six irrigation technicians and Drip as a friend to the company's mascot, Pip, which stands for partnership in planning.

Taking a content marketing approach, she called on the expertise of Roger Barden, CLIA, irrigation manager at JRGM, to get out the most pertinent information to water end-users.

Smart irrigation fundamentals, Barden says, were the most important education elements for the company.

"In Virginia, really, we're not in the stage of having to do a whole lot of water conservation just yet," he says. "We're just trying to get ahead of everyone on that theme. It just makes sense."

A chief message the company relayed, Valentine says, was about irrigation technology, such as rain sensors, precision nozzles and soil moisture sensors—products that simplify the irrigation process and save time and money.

Throughout the month, Valentine composed a total of three educational blog posts—the first, introducing the campaign; the second, providing product breakdowns; and the third, wrapping up the outreach with a video of an irrigation audit, which garnered nearly 200 views on YouTube.

She also posted multiple tips per week on smart water practices to the company's Facebook page. Some of those included:

- ▶ Creating water zones for plants;
- ▶ Adjusting watering schedules depending on weather conditions;
- ▶ Maintaining and examining sprinkler systems; and
- ▶ Ways to improve conservation habits in daily routines.

Additionally, as a play on smart irrigation, JRGM distributed to clients bottles of Glacéau Smartwater with a Smart Irrigation Month koozie and tag about Drip.

"Our efforts did not go unnoticed, that's for sure," Valentine says. "Our concept itself and our creativity helped draw more attention to the idea of Smart



Roger Barden (right) accepts James River Grounds Management's 2013 Smart Marketing Contest award at the Irrigation Show & Education Conference from Smart Irrigation Month committee chair Lowell Kaufhold.

Irrigation Month rather than increasing our contract sales for irrigation.”

Increasing sales, though, was never JRGM's reason for participating in the contest, Valentine says.

“Our goal was to educate, inform and then enable our clients to know the technologies and tactics we have to provide them with not only a smaller water bill, but a greener landscape,” she says. “It's not just cutting grass anymore. As a company, we have the ability to impact our community around us.”

From an internal perspective, Barden says the contest boosted “team morale” within the irrigation division.

“All the production team was on board with this, helping to look for



things that could help the clients save money,”

he said at the Irrigation Show & Education Conference in Austin, Texas, where he traveled to receive the award Nov. 6.

Reflecting on JRGM's efforts, he said at the show: “Our clients now know we care. We care about our environment and we care about them.”

James River Grounds Management promoted Smart Irrigation Month through Facebook, a company blog, client gifts and a mascot named Drip.

## The Ticker:

### IRRIGATION

**Tucor** and **Netafim's** landscape division partnered to develop web-based smart control systems, which will be marketed by Netafim. The controllers will feature multifunction capabilities, including conventional, two-wire (decoder) and hybrid operation.

The **Irrigation Association** developed three new spreadsheets to assist irrigation designers and auditors: developed pipe sizing, dripline and scheduling calculators free for download by IA members at [ow.ly/ruNPu](http://ow.ly/ruNPu).

The **Rain Bird Academy Boot Camp**, taking place now through April, is a four-and-a-half-day training program for the IA's Certified Irrigation Technician (CIT) exam. At the end of each event, Rain Bird hosts the IA CIT exam.

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