

Water, water everywhere . . . not a drop to drink?

Founder shares wisdom and dispels myths about our drinking water

As we celebrate a half century in business, this article written in 2006 by our company founder Tom Newhof, PE holds some keen insights gained from his many years working in the water industry. He often instructs us to “understand a problem before trying to solve it”. When he wrote this article, the Great Lakes’ water levels were low so there was a growing fear that we needed to work quickly to keep people from trying to steal Lake Michigan water—or worse, sell it to make a profit. We were also nearing a recession that he saw coming.

Now in 2019, having survived a major recession that lasted a long time in Michigan, with the Great Lake water levels nearing record highs, and PFAS now a household word associated with drinking water, the four myths that Tom identified and his associated insights are more easily understood and appreciated. It’s worth the read.

Myth #1: We are using too much of the Great Lakes’ water.

On an average day, 150 billion gallons of water arrive in Michigan through rain and snow, and we only use 6.7% of it. The rest stays in our groundwater, lakes, and streams until it evaporates or flows out to the Atlantic Ocean.

Most of the 10 billion gallons that Michigan communities and businesses do use every day goes right back into the water cycle. About 80% is used as cooling water in thermoelectric power plants and released back into the Great Lakes. The remaining 20% is used for public and private drinking water supply, farming, and manufacturing—after which it passes through our drainage or wastewater systems and re-enters Michigan’s lakes and streams.

Myth #2: Drier areas of the country want to take our water.

Many people are worried about diversions—transporting water from the Great Lakes to somewhere outside the Great Lakes watershed. Not only would a large diversion to the Southwest be ridiculously expensive, but there are already legal ways to prevent it. The Water Resources Development Act (passed by Congress in 1986) gives the governor of any Great Lakes state the right to veto any diversion. Moreover, leaders from the Great Lakes Basin

states and provinces worked together to create the Great Lakes Charter—an agreement to minimize pollution and prevent diversions. Diversions to the thirsty Southwest are not a threat.

Myth #3: Bottled water companies are a threat to the Great Lakes.

The idea of bottled water companies selling “our” water makes a lot of people anxious, but we have to remember two things. First, hundreds of companies across Michigan already send water out of the Great Lakes Basin in the form of canned goods, processed food, and drinks. These companies have been sending our water all over the world for decades. Our economy has grown, and our environment hasn’t suffered for it. If this water use doesn’t concern us, why should bottled water?

Second, before we worry that bottled water companies will take “too much” water, we need to understand what “too much” means. Any time a company wants to draw significant amounts of water, studies should be performed to determine how much water goes in, how much will be taken out, and if the source can sustain the demands. That’s called sustainability—responsible water use that doesn’t dry up or damage wells, streams, and other sources. The emphasis should be on sustainability (using the right amount) not conservation (using less).

Myth #4: The greatest threat to the Great Lakes is over-use.

Actually, the greatest threat to the Great Lakes is contamination. We have to start talking about the quality of our water, about soil erosion, toxic waste discharges, and everything that gets through our wastewater system—like microorganisms that are resistant to chlorine, residual chemicals from prescription drugs, and chemicals from our soaps, perfumes, and cosmetics. The EPA is finding all of these in our lakes and streams, and there’s a big concern that these things will end up in our drinking water as well. If we want to protect our water, we should think first about improving its quality, not reducing the quantity that we use.



Key Points

- Michigan has A LOT of water.
- No one is going to steal it from us and we aren’t going to run out of it.
- The Great Lakes basin contains 20% of the world’s fresh water.
- Water is Michigan’s most abundant resource—the one that no one else can match. We should focus on using it well, rather than on stifling our ability to grow.
- The greatest threat to the Great Lakes is contamination, not using too much water. We need to protect the quality of our water.

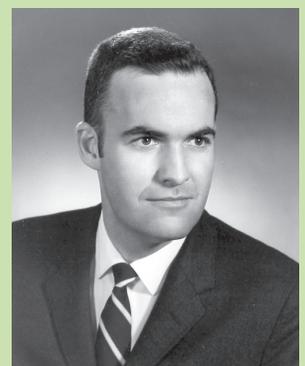
Prein&Newhof celebrates 50 years with appreciation

Sunday, April 21, 2019 marked 50 years of operation for Prein&Newhof. Prein&Newhof was founded in 1969 by **H. Edward Prein, PE, RLS** and **Thomas Newhof, PE**—both natives of Grand Rapids. Newhof and Prein worked together before partnering to begin their own venture.

According to Newhof, “It was Ed’s idea to start our own business. I was complaining to him that our design intent would only have the best result if we were to stay with a project from start to finish. Ed told me that he thought we should start our own business. I hadn’t thought that this was something that we should do at the time, but Ed did and he

convinced me to join him. For that foresight, I will always be grateful.” Since that first day, P&N has worked on over 30,000 projects and has employed 700+ people. Today there are more than 140 full-time employees working from seven locations across Michigan.

Ed Prein passed away last year, having retired from the company in 1995. Tom Newhof, now 82, still comes in to work a few times a week. He says that if he could, he’d do it all over again. In 1994, they established an Employee Stock Ownership Plan (ESOP) so that they could transition the company ownership to their employees. This also allowed



Ed Prein, PE, RLS (1970)



Tom Newhof, PE (1970)



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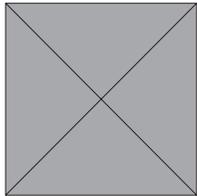


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them to fulfill their promise to each other that they would not be absentee owners and their desire that the company profits would go to those who were working, thereby providing their employees with the incentive to maintain their founding goal to provide their clients with high quality service and the best possible project results.

P&N President Tom J. Newhof says, “We are thrilled to celebrate this milestone. We are grateful to Ed and Tom for establishing not just this company, but also for the values which have guided us well through 50 years. We are also thankful to the many talented professionals who have followed these values to build P&N into what it is today. As we look forward, we are excited to continue to meet our clients’ needs, improving the quality of life for people across the state, and providing a great place for our employee-owners to build meaningful careers. The values that Ed and Tom established for P&N continue to guide us as we seek to craft long-term solutions and see farther together with our clients and with our colleagues.”

7 More Professionals Join Prein&Newhof

Adam Assink, EIT works from our Muskegon office as an Engineer-in-Training. Adam holds a bachelor’s degree in environmental engineering with a specialty in sustainable engineering from the University of Michigan.

Brett Hastings works from our Cadillac office as a Construction Observer. Brett previously worked as a Field Supervisor and Meter Technician for Tru-Check.

Dan Ridderbos, EIT works in our Grand Rapids office as an Engineer-in-Training. Dan graduated from the University of Michigan with a bachelor’s degree in civil engineering and a specialty in geotechnical and hydrological engineering.

Jacob VanderMate joined P&N as a Construction Observer in our Cadillac office. He came to us from the concrete construction industry. Jacob is also actively serving in the U.S. Army Reserve.

Jana Brown, EIT works as an Engineer-in-Training at our Grand Rapids office. Janna graduated from Michigan Technological University with a master’s degree in environmental engineering.

Jesse Boogaard is now a Construction Observer at P&N’s Holland office. He came to us with 16 years of experience working as a Foreman for the City of Grandville.

Jim Powell joined P&N as a Construction Observer in our Cadillac office. He comes to us with over 20 years of experience in the construction industry.

Prein&Newhof specializes in:

- Civil & Environmental Engineering
- Environmental Consulting
- Surveying
- Geographic Information Systems
- Laboratory Testing
- Landscape Architecture

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