

## Raising the Curtain

Last October/November's *Deeds* column featured a three-question damage report. The column suggested that if one actually sought damage prevention's Holy Grail — a significant reduction in avoidable damage to underground pipes and cables — then all one needed were honest answers to three simple questions following any utility damage:

- 1) Could the damaged line have been located accurately from the surface?
- 2) If yes, why was the line damaged?
- 3) If no, what can be done to keep this line from being hit again?

These questions would be asked of the excavator that damaged the line, too. The excavator's answers to these three questions would have equal weight to that of the utility. If the questions were answered honestly over the course of one hundred damages, or so, the solution for significantly reducing avoidable damages would be obvious.

Naturally, the thorn in this rose is the "honest answers" part. Utility companies use damage reports to determine financial responsibility for repairs. The process of determining financial responsibility does not lend itself to shaping the future of damage prevention. That's why *Deeds* suggested the cost of repairing these hundred or so damages should be waived. With our damage report, financial responsibility must take a back seat to producing valuable insight. We're looking for long-range solutions, not simple restitution.

In order to give us the best chance of driving home our point, the three-question damage report will be the focus of multiple *Deeds* columns. The rest of this column will serve as a prelude for the columns to come — it's a curtain-raising column. You're going to be seeing the stage before we introduce the characters. So, sit back and enjoy the play.

In 1972, a new boulevard was constructed in a somewhat sleepy suburban enclave. The city water department and the local gas company placed their pipes along the road while the phone and electric companies trenched in their cables. The gas company installed plastic pipe and along with the pipe, they placed a bi-metal, non-insulated tracer wire. Asbestos cement water pipe was the material of choice for the water department and bare concentric primary cable was the choice for the electric company. The phone company laid insulated copper cables.

A decade later, the boulevard was widened and additions were made to the storm sewer system. Cable television lines were plowed into the ground. A new phone duct was installed to bring feeder lines to the bustling new subdivisions popping-up at the edge of town. A couple of intersections along the boulevard were outfitted with traffic signals.

In 2001, the electric company replaced their failure-prone primary cables with new jacketed primary cable installed in conduit. The bare concentric cable was abandoned in place. A cell phone tower was built on a piece of property with boulevard access necessitating the placement of a fiber optic line. In 2007, the phone company built an all-new fiber system throughout the city to replace its network of

copper cables. The work along the boulevard was completed in 2008. The copper cables installed in 1972 were abandoned in place.

As the curtain is raised, we discover it is 2010 and the Obama administration's ballyhooed infrastructure improvement programs are underway. Along the boulevard, materials have been delivered and equipment is positioned. The boulevard is about to get a facelift. **UF**



2001



2007



2010