

**Meeting a Need in the European Marketplace**

*Growth of Well Water Use Drives Need for Innovative Water Treatment Technologies.*

**Summary:** Glenn and Janet Gruett are the owners of Mineral-Right Inc. of Phillipsburg, Kansas, manufacturers of Crystal-Right media used in water conditioning equipment. They recently guided their company's introduction into both the Russian and European marketplaces. The following article chronicles their first experiences in setting up Mineral-Right's European distribution network.

The Gruetts chose to attend the Aquatech '96 show in Amsterdam in order to kick off the introduction of Crystal-Right in the international marketplace. Glenn consulted the Fleck Corporation, with whom he had closely worked for over three decades in the water treatment business, to solicit advice about whom to seek out at the biannual show. One person they were encouraged to meet was Eddie Albrecht, the general manager of Euraqua, one of Europe's largest water conditioning companies. At the Aquatech show, the Gruetts met Eddie, as well as representatives from 21 other countries, who were all interested in using Crystal-Right water conditioning media in the manufacture of their equipment.

By the end of the Aquatech show, Euraqua along with National Resources from Russia had placed a large order for samples of Crystal-Right media to be used in experimental Euraqua installations across Europe. At the same time, the Gruetts knew they had to make some serious decisions about how to follow through on all of the other inquiries they had received from companies throughout Europe and Russia. They were concerned about addressing the many different language and cultural differences while providing in-depth education on the varied applications of Crystal-Right. "It's a very useful and effective product, but it must be applied properly in order to reap its full benefits," explained Glenn. "That's why we insist on teaching seminars and providing extensive product training to our reps. Good communication is essential in this process."

Glenn and Janet set out on an extensive post-show tour of Europe with the intention of gauging their comfort level when trying to communicate with Europeans from the countries of Belgium, Netherlands, Germany and France. They had agreed that if they could successfully communicate with the people they encountered while traveling, then they would set up a distribution network with the many different representatives and companies whom they had met at Aquatech. If they felt that the communication challenges were too big, they would focus on establishing a relationship with a sole European distributor with existing business contacts throughout the continent. Their final decision: consolidate their distribution and education efforts by working with one European distributor.

Eddie Albrecht looked like a perfect match for Mineral-Right. As the general manager of Euraqua, he managed the sale and distribution of residential, commercial and industrial water conditioning equipment through a well-established network of dealers in 21 countries in Europe and

the Middle East. Eddie himself spoke five languages fluently, eliminating the language barrier which posed an obstacle for the Gruetts.

In order to establish strong lines of communication and get to know each other better on a professional and personal level, Glenn and Janet invited Eddie to their home in Wisconsin for a 10-day visit. "Actually, we really insisted that he travel to the U.S. so that we could become more comfortable with the person who would lead our European expansion," explained Glenn. "It is such a large investment of time and energy, and we wanted to be sure Eddie was right for Mineral-Right. Our products are only as good as the people who represent them."

First, however, the Gruetts returned alone to the U.S. and immediately shipped Crystal-Right product samples to Euraqua. During Eddie's subsequent visit to Wisconsin, the Gruetts scheduled a return trip to Europe in February and March of '97 to inspect Euraqua's experimental installations of Crystal-Right.

Their return trip to Wevelgem, Belgium, the city in which Euraqua is headquartered, was graciously hosted by Eddie Albrecht. The Gruetts presented a day long seminar on the varied applications of Crystal-Right to the company's distributors who traveled to Euraqua from all over Europe. "They all spoke English fluently. All we had to do was convert our measurements from the English to the metric system," recalled Glenn.

With Eddie's guidance and translating skills, the Gruetts traveled extensively and learned a lot about the natural and political forces which shape water distribution and treatment needs throughout modern Europe. They discovered water conditions which were very similar to what they encountered in the U.S. The hardness varied from relatively soft water (about 3 grains per gallon) to in excess of 100 grains per gallon. Generally, Glenn observed, Scandinavian countries have harder water.

Germany, France, Italy, and Belgium boast tremendous municipal water distribution systems. The support of this infrastructure is getting economically prohibitive for many water users in Europe, especially in rural areas where farmers have their water piped in for all of their farming water needs. Similar to the United States, increased urban sprawl throughout Europe places expansion pressures on public works system and pushes costs up. Currently, just about every water application in these countries uses expensive municipal water, from watering cattle to watering lawns.

Another concern for water users in Europe is biological contamination. Some countries in Europe require chlorination of softeners' mineral beds to address this problem. One of the costly side effects of this mandate is the degradation of conventional resin media when it is treated with chlorine.

An increasingly popular solution is to take large-volume and rural users off of the expensive municipal water systems and convert them to private wells. This changeover will drive a market for water softeners, filters, acid neutralizers and other water treatment equipment.

Given their observations, Glenn and Janet saw innumerable, cost-effective applications for Crystal-Right media. The manmade crystalline mineral has the capacity to remove hardness, iron and manganese, correct pH, absorb selective gases, and be safely chlorinated without degradation of the

media. Crystal-Right accomplishes all of these tasks within one unit, eliminating the need for large, multi-stage water treatment systems in homes or facilities with multiple water treatment challenges.

The Gruetts accompanied Albrecht to a meeting with Aqua Tech, a Euraqua dealer in Belgium. Aqua Tech's owner, Mr. Schmite, extended his hospitality with a friendly visit over coffee and then a tour of several Crystal-Right installations. "We found that doing business was much more casual in Europe than it is in the United States," explained Glenn. "It was very relaxed."

One of the first installations visited was a Belgium hog farm. The farmer was using well water to supply his operation, yet he had encountered severe iron bacteria problems which consistently clogged his pipes. A Euraqua water conditioner utilizing Crystal-Right media had been successfully installed and had eliminated the problem. The excellent filtering capabilities of the media results from Crystal-Right's specific gravity being heavier than iron and its ability to be backwashed at a much higher rate of speed than resin. This enables a more complete removal of the iron compared to other conventional methods. The unique crystalline structure of the media is a more effective filter than the plastic beads which make up traditional resin.

Another interesting visit was to a mushroom grower in northern Belgium. As a supplier of mushrooms to supermarkets, the farmer was concerned about the iron content of his well water which was coloring the mushrooms red. Glenn and Janet Gruett accompanied Eddie Albrecht and Mr. Schmite on a sales call to demonstrate how Crystal-Right can effectively filter out the offending mineral.

### **Why Europe?**

The market for water treatment and conditioning products in Europe will only expand as the expense of municipal water systems exceeds what water users are willing or able to pay. Debts from decades of investments in infrastructure and increasing pressures from urban sprawl are forcing many European governments to reconsider the expense of expanding these huge water delivery systems. One option is to increase the usage of wells instead of increasing the delivery of piped-in water, especially to high-volume users or farms.

With this increase in ground water usage, the market for residential, commercial and industrial water treatment systems and products will grow. Because of its ability to remove hardness, iron and manganese, correct pH, absorb harmful gases, and be safely chlorinated without degradation of the media, Crystal-Right becomes the correct and cost-effective choice for most water-treatment problems. In partnership with Euraqua, Mineral-Right sees great potential for the correct application and continent-wide distribution of Crystal-Right.