



Rich Scrivner donated his time and labor to help build a new irrigation well at Malta's new park.

## A Gift that Keeps on Giving

*When it comes to supporting his community, Rich Scrivner knows the drill*

**By Dianna Troyer**

Rich Scrivner hopes his gift to the town of Malta will keep on giving for decades.

"A well lasts for years with routine maintenance," he says while drilling a 6-inch irrigation well at the town's new park in August.

After Jim Powers donated land for the park, Rich offered to provide his well-drilling rig and labor for free.

"The city bought the pipe, pump and other parts, and we did the rest," he says

about himself and his two-man crew.

Rich has been drilling wells throughout the Raft River Valley since 2003.

"I was living in Caldwell and had a rig, and a friend of mine, Sherm Couch, needed help, so I started working in the area to back him up," Rich says. "He passed away, and there was still so much work to be done that I've never left."

Rich, 67, says drilling wells has been a gratifying career for decades.

"Every job is different," he says. "You never know what you'll run into. When

I'm done, I have a great sense of accomplishment. Like gold, silver or copper, water is a valuable commodity. Unlike metals, though, you can't live without it."

Rich's path to drilling started after graduation from Minico High School. He found jobs working on oil drilling rigs in Wyoming, where he also learned to weld and run heavy equipment.

"With my background, a friend who was a well driller talked me into going into the business," says Rich. "Over the years, I've been fortunate to have a few



**Rich enjoys racing his 1957 Chevy on ¼-mile drag strips in Las Vegas, Portland and Seattle. Drill bits can be up to 24 inches in diameter and weigh up to 1,800 pounds.**

mentors who were seasoned well drillers.”

Winter is his busiest time.

“From mid-October to May, it’s go, go, go,” he says. “Farmers need the water in summer, so I do my drilling and maintenance during their down time.”

Rich stores the massive tools of his trade along the edges of his 1-acre property in Malta.

Drill bits range in diameter from 16 to 24 inches. They weigh 1,500 to 1,800 pounds and stretch 6 to 8 feet long. Next to them are 150-pound wrenches he must maneuver with a hydraulic winch to tighten the bits onto a drilling stem.

“Those are my dog houses,” Rich says, pointing to two red wooden trailers stocked with tools, chairs and a wood stove that burns lump coal. He hauls the trailers to winter worksites, where they provide shelter and warmth.

“When I first started, some farmers would put round bales around the rig for a windbreak, and I’d sit in my truck,” Rich says. “These are a lot more comfortable.”

Rich estimates he has drilled 30 new irrigation wells in the region as far south as Park Valley and as far north as Paul. A typical well provides 3,000 gallons of water a minute.

Rich has repaired or cleaned countless other wells, relying on a camera to help

diagnose problems.

“If you’re not using a camera, you’re making an educated guess about what’s wrong,” he says.

He encourages irrigators to do routine maintenance on their wells.

“It’s a lot cheaper—about \$18,000—than drilling a new 600-foot-deep well that will cost about \$180,000 for the drilling, electrical lines, pump and pipe,” Rich explains.

The area’s geology can damage a well. A fault line runs through part of the Raft River Valley. As the earth moves, it often shifts the well casing slightly.

To make it straight and round again, Rich inserts a swedge—a large cone-shaped piece of metal with a cable attached to it—into the casing.

“Then you beat on it,” he says, laughing.

As the swedge descends and pressure is applied, the casing becomes round and straight again.

To remove mineral buildup, Rich uses a high-pressure pump that sprays 9 gallons of water a minute at 5,000 pounds per square inch.

“That jetter head can make a casing look new,” he says.

During summer when work is slow, Rich races a hot rod and fishes. He drives his 1957 Chevy in the Super Stock

division at ¼-mile drag races in Las Vegas, Seattle and Portland.

“A bad day fishing is always better than a good day of work,” he says, grinning.

Rich spent several summers remodeling the former Desert Dog Café into his 3,000-square-foot home and office.

“It has quite a history,” he says. “Before it was a café and bar, it was the Simplot cheese plant. Now it’s home to me.”

As Rich and his crew, Joe Mobley and John Marshall, worked on the new well at the Malta park, gravel kept caving into the shaft.

“Every time you start a new well, it’s the start of a new adventure,” says Joe. “That’s what makes each job interesting.”

John agrees.

“Some days, I’d love to be bored on the job, but that never happens,” he says. “Every day is different with unexpected things happening.”

Rich says, “The geology 50 yards away from here is completely different. I drilled a well there, and it went smoothly without there being so much gravel.”

As for retirement, Rich says he plans to keep working.

“I’m like most well drillers,” he says. “The only way I’ll quit is when I die on the back of a rig.” ■