

One Last Hurrah at Columbus 2011 Annual Conference

By Charles Bausch, Training Specialist

The 33rd NeRWA Annual Conference in Columbus once again proved to be a great place for Nebraska water and wastewater system personnel to experience the many facets of their industry. Attendees experienced training sessions, viewed equipment exhibits, made new friends or just caught up with old ones. A crowd of over 540 persons attended the conference on March 21-23, 2011 at the New World Inn in Columbus.

Monday morning, March 21, began with registration and the set-up of exhibits and displays. This year the conference was able to accommodate 55 exhibitors, including several first-time exhibitors. Traffic through the exhibit area was steady throughout the conference as attendees took advantage of the opportunity to check out new product displays and to do some shopping for their utilities. NeRWA would like to say thank you to all the exhibitors for their participation. You help provide a great experience for conference attendees.

Conference training sessions on Monday afternoon were in the Courtyard area which is the best place to accommodate the large crowd of attendees. First day sessions have traditionally been well attended in the past and this was again true in 2011. Charles Bausch opened the day with a short welcome speech about taking back your customers by promoting your water system. This theme revolved around the damage the bottled water companies have done to customers' confidence in the public water system. Jack Daniel of NDHHS provided the *Nebraska Water System Regulatory Update*, followed by the *USDA Land Condemnation*, presented by Richard Keith of USDA and William Blake of Baylor Evnen. Dave Taladay and Emily Bausch of SENDD presented *Development District Assistance* where Dave showed all the different hats a development district wears to help a community with a project. The next session of the day was *Alternate Funding Sources* presented by Mary Schroer of NDEQ, and Steve McNulty and Kris Luebbe from NDHHS. This session showed operators what money was available for this year's projects. The final session, *Working with Contractors* presented by Matt Thurlby from OSHA, was not only

educational but very entertaining. Matt talked about how to handle contractors doing work for you in your utility system. He also talked about trench safety and judging an unsafe work scene. Once sessions were concluded the Monday night social hour started, followed by an excellent meal and the day ended with game night. Game night gave attendees a chance to win tickets for some very nice prizes, such as a Kindle, a portable DVD player and a cordless drill, just to name a few.

Tuesday was again our biggest day for attendance. Conference attendees were able to choose from a variety of training sessions. Tuesday and Wednesday's schedules were designed for operators to pick and choose what sessions they want to attend from four concurrent sessions. All of the sessions were designed to provide continuing education re-certification hours for water, wastewater and backflow.

The highlight of each Annual Conference is the banquet and awards ceremony held on Tuesday evening. Following another delicious meal, awards were presented as follows: Winner of the **Best Tasting Water Contest** was the Village of Trenton represented by Joe Cole. The Village of Trenton's water will now be entered in the National Best Tasting Water competition sponsored by the National Rural Water Association. NDHHS personnel presented two **Water Operators of the Year Awards**. One award went to Jack Cordes of the City of Scribner and the other to Robert (Bob) G. Curry of Johnson Co. RWD #1. Congratulations to these individuals and systems for their excellent work. The evening concluded with a very funny and entertaining comic performance by Chris Barnes.

Many people were on hand at 7:00 a.m. for Wednesday morning's complimentary buffet breakfast and followed by NeRWA's Annual Business meeting. Twenty great training sessions were well attended in the morning and afternoon on Wednesday. Raffle prize winners were announced at the noon luncheon. By 3:00 p.m. all sessions were finished and the process of loading up for the trip home began as attendees, exhibitors and presenters said goodbye **one final time to Columbus and to another great conference.**

NeRWA is once again grateful to everyone who works to make the conference a success. Among these are the exhibitors who add so much

to the total conference experience. Special thanks to the *Gold Exhibitors*, who made cash donations of \$500 or more: Bartlett & West Engineers, HD Supply, Municipal Supply, Sargent Drilling, Utility Service Inc., and Lincoln Winwater. Special thanks also to the *Silver Exhibitors* (cash donations of \$300 or more): Maguire Iron, Inc., Miller & Associates, and JEO Consulting. Finally a special thanks to our *Bronze Exhibitor* (cash donation of \$100) Team Laboratory.

NeRWA is also appreciative of the expertise of all those who prepared and delivered presentations. While some training sessions are old favorites that seem to be repeated year after year, there were a variety of new topics and new presenters at the 2011 Conference. NeRWA strives to provide training that challenges operators and other utility personnel, provides new ways to solve problems and provides timely information. Each and every presenter, and they are too numerous to name here, did their best to provide quality information to those in attendance.

Once again some sessions may have been crowded this year. However, the move to Grand Island's Heartland Event Center in 2012 should alleviate this problem with larger rooms for sessions and exhibits. It has been observed that people attend the Annual Conference for a variety of reasons - for the exhibits, for meeting with friends and acquaintances, and for training. NeRWA thanks all of you who attended the conference this year from villages, cities and water and wastewater systems throughout the state. We look forward to seeing you again in 2012 at Grand Island. Remember the Holiday Inn block is open so get your reservations in early as this block will soon fill up!