

Highlights from the 2005 Annual Conference

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4/12/05

The 27th NeRWA Annual Conference once again proved to be a great place for Nebraska water system personnel to learn more about the water business by attending training sessions, viewing equipment exhibits and just relaxing with friends. A record crowd of over 500 persons attended the conference held during March 14 – 16 at the New World Inn in Columbus.

By late Monday morning, March 14, the majority of the exhibitors were in the building setting up their equipment and displays. A total of 47 exhibitors participated this year, again, a record high. NeRWA salutes the efforts and participation of all the exhibitors, who help provide a “complete experience for conference goers.

The main feature of March 14 was a panel discussion and open forum discussion on the topic of *Bioterrorism and Response by Nebraska Water Systems and State Agencies*. This event had been well publicized in advance as evidenced by strong attendance by water system personnel, the public, Nebraska dignitaries, and the press.

Featured panel discussion members for the forum, which was held from 1:00 – 3:00 pm, were: Lieutenant Governor Rick Sheehy, Chief of Nebraska Homeland Security; Al Berndt, Nebraska Emergency Management Agency; Colonel Tom Nesbitt, Superintendent of the Nebraska State Patrol; Jack Daniel of Nebraska Dept. of Health & Human Services; Bob Lundeen, Logan East Rural Water and NeRWA; and Lyle Juracek, representing the City of Neligh. Each panel member provided a description of their responsibilities in addressing security issues as well as the anticipated roles they would assume in the event a bioterrorism incident should impact a Nebraska water system, or their specific water system.

“The first line of defense in homeland security is hometown security,” Lt. Gov. Sheehy said, reinforcing the need for water systems to communicate with local law enforcement and emergency management personnel in order to increase the security of the water supply and other critical government assets. A large crowd attended this very informative session and panel members fielded a variety of questions from the audience during the open forum.

Following scheduled training sessions, a social and bar-b-que meal, over 200 persons spent the evening in the courtyard playing casino-type games including blackjack, roulette, bingo and Texas Hold-em. The games paid off generously for most everyone, and winners were able to cash in their script money for a variety of prizes at the conclusion of the evening. Special thanks to Sargent Drilling for sharing in the fun with their version of the “Color Wheel” and to NeRWA board members and staff for manning the games.

Tuesday was bustling and busy as conference-goers attended as many of the training sessions as they could. A total of 42 different training sessions were available for attendees to choose from during the three-day conference, as operators attended a variety of sessions and received water, wastewater and backflow re-certification hours. *The Small System and Rural Water Round Table* sessions were again well attended, as were “round tables” for *Board and Council* members and *Wastewater Operators*. Jerry Biberstine of National Rural Water Association presented interesting sessions on the topics of *Endocrine Disruptors and Re-Visiting The Total Coliform Rule*. Jeff Olsen of Neptune Meters, Brad Cutler of Sensus Technologies, Steve Mereness of Hydro-Metering, and John Daugherty of Utility Solutions Associates presented separate sessions on *Automated Meter Reading Systems*. Some of the sessions may have been too crowded for comfort, but each and every presenter provided his or her audience with quality information. NeRWA is grateful for the contribution of time and effort provided by those who gave presentations at the conference.

The annual Best Tasting Water Contest was held during the noon luncheon on Tuesday. (Refer to the article elsewhere in this issue for details) Conference-goers then returned to attend another round of training sessions or to visit the exhibit booths during the afternoon.

The highlight of each Annual Conference is the Banquet and Awards Ceremony, held on Tuesday evening. Following a delicious meal of filet mignon, Phase II, a men's singing group featuring barbershop quartet music mixed with generous amounts of humor, entertained the audience.

NeRWA Circuit Rider Randy Hellbusch emceed the evening activities. Clancy Dempsey presented the winner of the *Best Tasting Water Contest* to the Village of Howells. Jim Heyen presented *NeRWA Wastewater Awards* to the City of Randolph and the Village of Dannebrog. Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services *Water Operator of the Year* winners were announced, and the 2005 winners were Allyn Papousek of the City of Clarkson and William Guilliams of the Village of Verdon. NDHSS Field Representatives Richard Koenig and Rob Williams presented these awards. Congratulations to these individuals and systems for their excellent performance!

Finally, major door prizes donated by associate members were awarded to the following persons: *Outdoor Fireplace*, donated by Water Products, Inc., went to Dan Atkins of Douglas; *Craftsman Cordless Drill*, provided by PeopleService, was won by Bruce Long of Ewing; \$100 *in cash* donated by Maquire Iron, Inc., went to Doug Peters of Ashland; and a two-seat Camping *Chair* was won by Jack Cordes of Scribner, compliments of Hawkins Water Treatment.

Many people were on hand at 7:00 a.m. Wednesday when the complimentary buffet breakfast was served, followed by NeRWA's Annual Business meeting. Training sessions were well attended in the morning and afternoon on Wednesday. A variety of door prizes were awarded at the noon luncheon, highlighted by the *Binelli Pump Shotgun*, which was donated by Municipal Supply, Inc., being won by Terry Nelson of Loomis. By 4:00 p.m., however, all was loaded for the trip home as attendees, exhibitors and presenters said goodbye to another great conference.

NeRWA is grateful everyone who works to make the conference a success. Among these are Exhibitors, who add much to the total conference experience. Special thanks the *Gold Exhibitors*, who made cash donations of \$500 or more: Bartlett & West Engineers, Municipal Supply, Inc., and Utility Service Co. Special thanks also to *Silver Exhibitors* (cash donations of \$250 or more): Miller & Associates, Mongan Painting, National Waterworks, and Sargent Drilling. NeRWA is also grateful for the expertise of the Bioterrorism Panel members, to those who prepared and delivered presentations, and most important, to all those who attended the Annual Conference from villages, cities and water systems throughout the state. We look forward to seeing you again next year at Columbus!

