

2006 Annual Conference Highlights

Fred Baumert

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Well over 500 persons attended the 28th Annual NeRWA Conference held during March 13 – 15 at the New World Inn in Columbus. The conference once again proved to be a great place for Nebraska water and wastewater system personnel to learn more about their profession by attending training sessions, viewing equipment exhibits and just relaxing with friends.

A record number of 47 exhibitors participated in the conference this year. A more spacious exhibit area than in the past was made possible by using a different exhibit booth arrangement and adding additional footage. By late Monday morning, March 13, the majority of the exhibitors were in the building setting up their equipment and displays. NeRWA salutes the efforts and participation of all the exhibitors, who help provide a “complete experience for conference goers.

The Conference opened with a packed audience attending the general sessions in the Main Ballroom area. Keynote speaker Nebraska Lt. Governor Rick Sheehy addressed recent pressures placed on the state’s water resources, the need for groundwater management plans, the central importance of water to Nebraska agriculture, farm land and producers as well as the need for water systems to meet growing demand and water quality requirements. “Water is the topic and issue of the decade. We cannot take this finite resource for granted,” said Sheehy. “We must come up with a plan for long term sustaining use and management of this vital resource.”

An Overview of National Safe Drinking Water Regulations by EPA Region 7 representative Kenneth Deason, and a Nebraska Water System Regulatory Update by Jack Daniel of HHSS followed the Lt. Governor’s address. Jim Cook, Legal Counsel for the NE Department of Natural Resources gave a very interesting account of current Nebraska water issues, including the Impact of LB 962 and the ongoing Republican River Compact settlement.

Following an afternoon of sessions and touring exhibits, a social and dinner meal was held in the courtyard. A large group, who then adjourned for a relaxing evening of playing cards and listening to music, attended the Annual Best Tasting Water Contest.

Two special competitions were also held in the courtyard on Monday evening.

Hach representatives Gordon Peterson and Terry Englehardt conducted a Chlorine Residual Test Competition. Contestants were judged on their ability to use the test equipment, accuracy of measurement and time. The winner of the competition was Christy Christiansen of the City of Papillion, who took home a new Hach Colorimeter for her efforts.

A Best Fitting to Make the Repair Competition was also well attended. Competitors were required to inspect a broken piece of pipe, determine the OD and thickness, then place an order with the parts salesman as to the parts need to make the repair. Brian McDowell of Water Products, Inc., and Kent Culbertson of American AVK conducted the competition. Following several rounds of intense competition, the winner was judged to be Mervin White of the City of Hebron.

Special thanks to Gordon, Terry, Brian and Kent for organizing and conducting the competitions, and for all the competitors who stepped up to the challenge.

Tuesday was bustling and busy as conference-goers attended as many of the training sessions as they could. A total of 50 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*. 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 highlight of each Annual Conference is the Banquet, held on Tuesday evening. Following a delicious filet mignon dinner, the dance floor cleared guests were treated to the dynamic performance by *Whiplash*. This National Champion Dance Team from Lincoln, NE, kept the audience riveted and asking for more with their clogging, river dance, and modern dance performances. At one point *Whiplash* recruited other “dancers” from the audience to add to the excitement. The memorable performance concluded with a rousing round of applause from the audience, with the hope that we might see more of them in the future.

Following the performance, NeRWA Groundwater Specialist Clancy Dempsey presented the winner of the *Best Tasting Water Contest* to the City of Scottsbluff. Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services *Water Operator of the Year* winners were announced, and the 2006 winners were John Mueller of the Village of Exeter and Mike Nuttelmann of the City of Norfolk. NDHHS Field Representatives Bob Byrkit and Richard Koenig presented these awards. Congratulations to these individuals and systems for their excellent performance!

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. 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, National Waterworks, Municipal Supply, Inc., Utility Service Company, Sargent Drilling and EAI West. Special thanks also to *Silver Exhibitors* (cash donations of \$250 or more): Miller & Associates, Mongan Painting, Sensus Meter and Layne Western Company. NeRWA is also grateful 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!

