

Highlights from the 2007 Annual Conference

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The 29th NeRWA Annual Conference once again proved to be a great place for Nebraska water and wastewater system personnel to experience the many facets of their industry by attending training sessions, viewing equipment exhibits and just relaxing with friends. A crowd of over 500 persons attended the conference on March 12-14, 2007 at the New World Inn in Columbus.

Monday morning, March 12, began with registration and the set-up of exhibits and displays. As a result of making some room changes, the conference was able to accommodate 58 exhibitors this year, including seven 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, do some shopping for their utilities, or swap stories with sales representatives. NeRWA salutes the efforts and participation of all the exhibitors, who help provide a complete experience for conference goers.

A trap shoot competition, organized by Dave Dunning of HD Supply Waterworks, was also held on Monday morning at the nearby Izaak Walton Trap Shoot Range.

Conference training sessions scheduled for Monday afternoon were re-located from the traditional ballrooms to the Courtyard area in an attempt to accommodate the large crowd of people more comfortably. First day sessions have traditionally been well attended in the past, and this was again true in 2007. Howard Isaacs, Mary Poe and Steve Drda of HHSS provided the *Nebraska Water System Regulatory Update*, followed by the *Rural Development Annual Advisory*, presented by Denise Brosius-Meeks of USDA Rural Development. Elmer Ronnebaum of the neighboring Kansas Rural Water Association gave an accounting of the *KAN-STEP Program*, whereby water system improvements are funded by state grant funds with the requirement that community residents provide the labor to install water lines, meters, or fire hydrants, etc. A *Board / Council Roundtable* discussion, led by Tom Goulette, and a session entitled *Enhance Your Utility Image*, presented by Randy Hellbusch and Fred Baumert, concluded the first day of training sessions.

Monday evening was spent relaxing at the social hour and evening buffet meal, taking in the Annual Best Tasting Water Competition, and participating in games of chance or enjoying a game of cards in the Courtyard area. Special thanks to exhibitors who volunteered their time to conduct the evening games: Utility Service Co., Sargent Drilling Co., Hawkins Water Treatment Group, Miller & Associates Consulting Engineers, Technical Maintenance & Service Co., and Bartlett & West Engineers. Another source of friendly competition was available on Monday evening and throughout the Conference-- a Valve-Torque Machine, provided jointly by American AVK Company and Water Products, Inc. Thanks again to exhibitors who conducted the competitions and provided prizes for the winners.

The Columbus American Legion Post officially kicked off the Conference on Tuesday morning with the Advancing of the Colors. Opening Ceremonies were conducted by Clancy Dempsey, NeRWA Executive Director, and included a featured address by Mr. Joe Liles, Vice President of the National Rural Water Association.

Tuesday was again bustling and busy as conference-goers attended a variety of the training sessions. Nearly 50 sessions were scheduled during the three-day conference, the majority of which provided continuing education re-certification hours for water, wastewater and backflow. New this year were a number of training sessions that were pre-approved to provide CEU's for those holding Nebraska water well contractors and on-site wastewater certifications.

The *Small Water System Roundtable* and *Rural Water District Roundtable* presentations have been well received in the past, and attendance this year was large as expected. Mr. Mike Harrington of USA Bluebook provided a challenging and interesting five-hour block of instruction entitled *True Confessions of a Water/Wastewater Operator*. This session was highly evaluated by those in attendance. Another session entitled *Ethics in the Water/Wastewater Industry*, presented by Dr. Andrew Jameton, received mixed reactions. Dr. Jameton spoke candidly from his point of view about ethics and general perceptions of the water and wastewater industry. Attendee comments indicated they either liked what was said, or they didn't. From aspect of arranging for a training session that provided a different insight and provided food for thought, this was a good choice!

The ethanol industry in Nebraska occupied the time and thoughts of many attendees on Tuesday. Todd Sneller of the NE Ethanol Board in his presentation, *The Ethanol Industry In Nebraska*, provided a general overview of the topic. One might argue that this topic is not especially important for most Nebraska communities. For those communities who presently provide utilities to ethanol plants, or plan to do so in the future, however, Sneller's presentation and the follow-up session, *Impact of Ethanol Industry on Nebraska Water and Wastewater Utilities*, hit the mark. Special thanks to these panel members: Dwayne Braun of U.S. Bio-Platte Valley; Chris Anderson, City of Central City; Rod Storm, City of Blair; Bob Engles and David Hunter, City of Auburn; and Paul Markowski, City of Ord. The city representatives shared their experiences and provided insight as to the direct involvement of their communities in the ethanol industry.

The highlight of each Annual Conference is the Banquet and Awards Ceremony, held on Tuesday evening. Following a delicious meal of filet mignon, awards were presented as follows: Winner of the Best Tasting Water Contest was the City of Curtis, represented by Sid Lewis. Second place was awarded to the City of Aurora, represented by Eric Melcher. Third place went to Cass County RWD 2, represented by Bob West. City of Curtis water will now be entered in the National Best Tasting Water competition sponsored by the National Rural Water Association.

NDHHS personnel presented two Water Operator of the Year Awards to Dallas Nichols of the City of Cozad, and to Galen Jueden of Cedar Know Rural Water System. Finally, Larry Andreasen of the City of Fremont received a special appreciation award from Nebraska Rural Water Association for his dedicated support of the NeRWA Utility EXPO. Congratulations to these individuals and systems for their excellent work.

The evening concluded with a very funny and entertaining performance by the Amazing Arthur.

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. Twenty great training sessions were well attended in the morning and afternoon on Wednesday. Door prize winners were announced at the noon luncheon. 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 once again grateful to 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, Layne Western Co., Municipal Supply, Inc., Sargent Drilling, and Utility Service Co. Special thanks also to *Silver Exhibitors* (cash donations of \$300 or more): EAI Central, Inc., Maquire Iron, Inc., Miller & Associates, Mongan Painting Co., and HD Supply Waterworks.

NeRWA is also grateful for 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 2007 Conference. NeRWA strives to provide training that challenges operators and other

utility personnel, provides new ways to solve problems or 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.

Some of the sessions may have been crowded this year as the room assignments were changed. However, those of you who attended the conference appeared to be forgiving of these inconveniences. It has been observed that people attend the Annual Conference for a variety of reasons—for the exhibits, for meeting with friends and acquaintances, for training, or for other reasons. 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 2008 at Columbus!