

# Conference Planning

By Pat Petersen

It's hard to believe, for me anyway, that it has already been four and a half years since I walked into this office for the first time as an employee. I remember that day quite well. I completed all of the necessary paperwork to become a full-time employee of the Nebraska Rural Water Association and then Barney and Salli looked at me and said, "Now you have five months to plan our annual conference." I'm sure I looked like a deer in the headlights at that moment but it had to be done. With that being said, this March will be the fifth conference that I have had the privilege to plan and coordinate. The luxury of having an entire year to plan makes this process a little less hectic than the five months I had for the first one.

I have never looked at planning the conferences as difficult. Challenging and fun are the two best ways to describe planning a conference. The challenge can lie in many places, such as finding new topics for the operators to appreciate, finding the right presenter to present the topics, oh and of course, what the heck are we all going to eat!

Each year we ask the operators that attend the conference to complete their evaluation forms and please give us any ideas of what you would like to see at the next conference. These evaluations are looked at one by one and are a very useful tool when it comes to seeing the operators' needs and wants. So, hopefully this year you will see some new and interesting topics, and you will also see some new faces that have graciously volunteered their time to present. There will still be some familiar faces that have given so much to our conference in the past years that the conference would not feel like "our" conference if they weren't a part of it.

The fun part of planning a conference is of course the many phone calls and gazillion e-mails to the vendors, presenters and operators asking for advice, sponsorship, etc. I ask a lot of our sponsors and it seems as if the word "no" is not in their vocabulary. With the sponsors' donations and their sponsorship of things, such as the fun night, and with the overall support of the operators, each of the last four annual conferences has been a complete success and we thank you for that.

Oh yes, the food part. The food at the Younes Conference Center is nothing short of spectacular. As I put together the menu this year I find it hard to change from last year because I thought the food was delicious. So I guess I'll leave you all hanging with that. Maybe we will see something different on the menu this year—maybe not. One tricky part of the "chow line" is how many will stick around to enjoy the meals. If you've never attended the banquet or enjoyed the midday lunches, give it a try this year. You won't be disappointed.

This year's conference is scheduled for March 13-15, 2017 in Kearney again at the Younes Conference Center. Be sure to book your rooms early so you can stay on "campus" with all of the festivities. I am looking forward to seeing many of you again and some of you for the first time. It is a great opportunity for everyone that considers themselves a water professional to get together.

Finally, before we even get to Kearney this year I want to thank all of the NeRWA crew that I count on to put this conference together. Salli, Carol, and Amy thanks for getting all of the necessary things completed in the office. Barney, Mike, Mike, Randy, and Ken, I will be counting on you all as my pack mules as we invade the Younes Center.

See you all in March!