

A Look Back at the 2014 Conference By Pat Petersen, Training

It was the eve of "St. Patrick's Day." Most people were getting ready to celebrate with green beer, corned beef and cabbage. Not the Nebraska Rural Water staff and board, we were all preparing for our 36th Annual Conference in Grand Island, Nebraska. Setting up for the conference can be very time consuming, but with the help of everyone we were all set by 5 PM on Sunday night. The conference was set to begin on Monday, March 17 at 1 PM and conclude Wednesday, March 19 at 2 PM. At this year's conference, operators were able to obtain 14 water CEU's, 5.5 backflow CEU's, 12.5 wastewater CEU's and 13.5 well driller CEU's.

On Monday, March 17 around 8 AM, vendors and exhibitors began setting up their booths for all to see and visit. This year we had a remarkable turnout in the exhibit hall. Over 60 vendors lined the floor in the arena of the Heartland Events Center. Vendors have the opportunity to be sponsors of the annual conference. This year we had one Platinum Sponsor, Municipal Supply; five Gold Sponsors, HOA Solutions, JEO Consulting, Lincoln WinWater, Sargent Drilling and Utility Service Co. Silver Sponsors were; Bartlett and West, HD Supply Waterworks, and Rehab Systems. ACCO Unlimited, Engineering America, Hydro Klean, Kriz-Davis Co., Maguire Iron, Miller & Associates, NMC, Omaha WinWater, PPG Industries and Tomcat Consultants/Tap Co. were the Bronze Sponsors. The Nebraska Rural Water Association appreciates such generosity from all of these sponsors who help make our conference a complete success.

Tom Goulette, the Nebraska Rural Water Association Board President, welcomed the operators and then gave way to Department of Health Drinking Water Administrator, Jack Daniel. Jack gave his annual regulatory update, followed by Earl Imler who informed the audience of the state's role in emergency response. Bill Podraza with Miller and Associates gave a very interesting and also entertaining presentation about stress in the workplace and how it affects us all. Denise Brosius-Meeks completed Monday's program with a USDA/Rural Development update.

After a quick meal on Monday evening, attendees were invited back to the Midtown Holiday Inn to have a little fun - Vegas style. Players could try their luck at several different types of games, such as Black Jack, Craps, Roulette and the Money Wheel. In the spirit of St. Patrick's Day green drinks, green beads and even green hats were out in full force at the game night. This game night would not have been successful without the generous donations from JEO Consulting, HOA Solutions, and Lincoln WinWater. They teamed with the Nebraska Rural Water Association to make this fun night a possibility.

Tuesday, or as I call it, "crazy" day, starts very early and finishes fairly late. The day is full of opportunities for the operators to learn, be refreshed, and network with all the other operators that attended the conference. Several roundtable discussions were held Tuesday morning to "break the ice" or get the operators comfortable with their surroundings followed by break-out sessions throughout the day. Some of the sessions operators could attend were iron and manganese removal options, water metering, locating and leak detection and how to handle non-paying customers.

A social hour hosted by HD Supply kicked off our Tuesday evening festivities. The social hour was followed by a wonderful banquet and awards. Doug Woodbeck, Field Services Manager, usually would give out the outstanding operator award but was unable to attend due to a knee replacement surgery he could not skip out on. We wish Doug the best of luck with his "new" knee. Taking over for Doug was Area 1 Field Rep. Fred Baumert. This year's Outstanding Operator Awards went to Jerry Clark from Falls City and Bob Lockmon from Stuart. These two operators have shown what it takes to be the best water

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operators any community could ask for. Congratulations Jerry and Bob and we wish you continued success in the future.

To close the evening, the Amazing Arthur Fratelli took the stage for an hour of laughs and entertainment. Arthur's event included several different types of magic and juggling acts. His performance was fantastic and hilariously funny!

Just like that, it was Wednesday, the final day of the conference and a lot of things to still get done. First priority was the operator breakfast held in the arena at the Heartland Events Center. After breakfast, the annual board meeting was held. One very important item at the meeting was the retirement of long time board member Eugene Schroeder with Cedar Knox Rural Water. His vacancy was filled by Ken Halvorsen from Lancaster Rural Water District #1. Good Luck Eugene on your retirement!

To wrap up the morning, it was back to the break-out sessions. Some of the highlights of Wednesday's sessions included a session about groundwater and Nebraska geology, field rep Q & A, and a session about Title 179, Chapter 7, Engineering and Design.

Wednesday's lunch included a very special guest, Nebraska's very own United States Representative Adrian Smith. He was in attendance to address the crowd and present the City of Curtis with its national champion "Best Tasting Drinking Water" award. Curtis had won Nebraska's Best Tasting Drinking Water contest at last year's conference and was automatically entered into the national contest. The rest is history! Congratulations to Curtis on their National Champion "Best Tasting Drinking Water!"

The Village of Trenton was the winner of the Best Tasting Drinking Water this year at our annual conference. They too have earned a shot at winning the same award that Curtis did! Good Luck Trenton!

Finally as Wednesday was wrapping up I found myself doing the most important thing of all; thanking everyone! Thanks to the vendors, it was the largest number of exhibits we have ever had. Thanks to all the presenters, you were all fantastic. Thanks to the Nebraska Rural Water Board for all of your help! Salli, Carol, Mike Lucas, Russ Topp, Randy Hellbusch, Barney Whatley and Mike Stanzel - Thank You. I couldn't ask for a better group to call my teammates! Also, to Dianne Willey and her support staff I say Thank You. I learned so much from all of you! The Heartland Events Center has been a great place for our conference the past three years and we were surrounded with great people.

As we close the curtain on our 2014 annual conference we look ahead to 2015. With that being said and our three year contract complete, the Nebraska Rural Water Association has chosen to move our conference to the Younes Convention Center in Kearney, Nebraska. You will see more updates about conference "37" and its new digs. Until then, have a safe and happy summer!