

2015 Conference Flashback

By Patrick Petersen, Training Specialist

When planning a conference there are so many variables that can come into play. Will they like the presentations? Are the participants comfortable? Is the venue big enough? Will they like the food? It's not a real easy task to plan a conference and then change sites after three years which adds another challenge. The best way to gauge how we did is to look at the evaluations you filled out and turned in at the end of the conference. According to the evaluations, our first year at the Younes Conference Center was a success. Thanks to all of you who made it a success; vendors, operators, administrators, board members, presenters, NeRWA Staff/Board and finally the Younes Conference Center Staff. Each and every one of you played an important role in the success of the conference.

The tradition of the Regulatory Update stayed in place this year although there was one major change. Howard Isaacs gave the presentation to a large audience of operators, clerks, administrators and board members. Jack Daniel had given this presentation for as long as I can remember! Howard did a fantastic job and one of the comments that I was told directly was, "That session alone was worth the price of registration." WAY TO GO HOWARD! Looks like I might have a spot for you at the fall conference.

Following Howard was the panel discussion about the devastating Pilger tornados. Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services Field Rep. for Area 3, Rich Koenig, along with operators and first responders to the tornado showed before and after photos and held an open discussion about that tragic day. This discussion could have easily surpassed the hour and a half it was allotted. The point driven home by this session was the importance of Emergency Planning.

The final presentation of the general session was given by Bill Podraza with Miller and Associates. Bill's presentation offered operators and employees tips on how to approach and present information to their boards and councils. Sometimes an operator may need to be more tactful when it comes to delivering information to their board and this session covered that.

The Monday evening festivities included a wonderful meal, The Chuckwagon Buffet, followed by a Vegas style fun night. Black Jack, Chuck-A-Luck, and Craps were just a few of the games of choice offered. The game night would not be possible without a core of sponsors who generously donated to this event. The game night sponsors were: JEO Consulting Engineers, HOA Solutions, Sargent Drilling, Engineering America, Engineered Systems and the Nebraska Rural Water Association. In my eyes, once again the game night was well received and was a success. Thanks again, sponsors! Let's do it again next year!

When Tuesday of the conference rolls around, it's time to put on our thinking caps and get ready to learn. The day consisted of 6 hours of breakout sessions giving operators several options for obtaining continuing education hours. Well Decommissioning, Sample Sites and Assessments, Utility Technology, and Round Table discussions were just a few of the sessions operators could attend. The small system round table seemed to be a crowd favorite. With that being said, we may have to have another round table later in the day at next year's conference.

After a quick social hour in the exhibit hall sponsored by HD Supply Waterworks, attendees made their way to the Diamond Ballroom for the Awards Banquet and entertainment. The meal was the "Grand Buffet" that included several choices and varieties of food for all to choose from. At the completion of

the meal, Andy Kahle was introduced as the new Field Services Manager for the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services in the Office of Drinking Water and Environmental Health. Andy introduced the State of Nebraska's Water Operator of the Year, Mr. Tony Corbin with the Village of Mullen. Tony is an outstanding operator and is very deserving of the award. Congratulations, Tony!!

The entertainment was provided by "176 Keys, Fun Pianos". There was some singing, dancing and a whole lot of fun to finish off Tuesday. I hope everyone enjoyed the show!

Wednesday's tradition of the Annual Operator Breakfast and Annual NeRWA Board meeting started bright and early, 7:30 AM to be exact. Operators enjoyed a fantastic breakfast and then participated in the meeting which included the installation of a new member. Tom Grovijohn and Larry Wennekamp retained their seats on the board and George Wagner of Hooper will fill the vacancy created by Dale Miller. Congratulations to the winners.

Training sessions resumed at 8:30 AM on Wednesday and concluded after lunch at 2:00 PM. During lunch the drawing for the raffle prizes was held. Once again, there were some fantastic items to be raffled off. Tara Vaida with USDA/RD won the "Husker" log. The tandem of Tim Bolling and Sid Lewis with the City of Central City each won a TV. Tim Pickinpaugh, City of Wakefield, won the power washer. Brett Rahe, Village of Dewitt, won the 255 piece tool set. Mike Stieren, City of Scribner, won the Kindle Fire. Kelly Bridgmon, Village of Cook, won the Craftsman power tool set. Brook Andersen, City of Wisner, took home the air compressor. The \$500 cash went to Alan Romine with the City of Falls City. For completing his evaluation Victor Paltz with the Village of St. Helena won the other 255 piece tool set. On behalf of NeRWA I would like to thank all of you who purchased raffle tickets.

At the beginning of this article I mentioned the importance of the evaluations. This is our written report card on how we did at the conference. I know I spoke with several operators and vendors who felt that this was the place we need to be for our conference. The evaluations reflected that opinion, too. With that being said, I hope to make the Younes Conference Center the NeRWA's home during one week each March.

The Younes Center staff is very friendly and accommodating and made my job much less stressful. Thank You!

Finally, I need to take this time to personally thank the NeRWA Board for always offering to help out in any way they can. Although I try not to find a task for you, I know each and every one of you is willing to help out. Thank You!

Salli, Barney, Carol, Mike Stanzel, Mike Lucas, Randy, and Russ, this conference would not be as big as it is if it wasn't for the solid foundation you have laid and knowing how to provide a quality learning experience that water operators deserve when attending this conference. You guys/gals are the best!

I'm sure most of you noticed that Carol Jasa our office secretary was not in attendance at the conference. I feel bad that she couldn't experience this conference but am relieved to say she is back to work. Matter of fact, she will take this article and proofread it before it hits the press. We missed you at the conference Carol.

As successful as the 2015 conference was, I guess, we'll just have to have next year's conference at the Younes Center in Kearney. It might even be bigger and better!