

## 2016 ANNUAL CONFERENCE - A SUCCESS!

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Once again the Nebraska Rural Water Association celebrated the largest training assembly for Nebraska water, wastewater, Grade 6, and well driller license holders with their annual conference. The conference was held March 21-23, 2016 in Kearney, Nebraska at the Younes Conference Center. The conference was a complete success due to the hard work of the Nebraska Rural Water Association staff and board, the generosity of the vendors and exhibitors, the Younes Center staff and the large number of operators who actually attended the conference.

The conference began with the annual regulatory update on Monday afternoon presented to a very large crowd. Andy Kahle, Field Services Manager for the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services, gave this address. Andy had to take the place of Administrator Howard Isaacs who had to be in Washington, D.C. on the dates of the conference. Other presenters during the Monday General Session included Rich Koenig, Field Rep. for the NDHHS, Bill Podraza, Miller and Associates and Marty Norton, Denise Brosius-Meeks, and Jim Wehrer with USDA/Rural Development.

Following Monday's training sessions was a quick meal and a bus ride to the Big Apple Bowling Center for a night of entertainment and fun. JEO Consulting Engineers spearheaded the event which was a tremendous success. Teaming up with JEO to help with the "Fun Night" was Sargent Drilling, HOA Solutions, Miller and Associates and the Nebraska Rural Water Association. Those who did attend were treated to free drinks, bowling, miniature golf and many other fun things that the Big Apple has to offer. After talking with the operators and vendors who attended this event, I think this could become a great part of our annual conference.

Tuesday was a day packed full of learning. Operators could choose from a variety of different sessions including trench safety, metering technology, well controls and many other items that pertain to the water operator trade. Always remember I am open to suggestions for conference training sessions so if there is something you would like to see at the conference, feel free to call the office or e-mail me.

When the day of learning came to an end it was time to get ready for the awards banquet. HD Supply sponsored a quick social hour giving everyone a chance to wind down from the busy day. After the wonderful banquet meal (every meal at the Younes Center is wonderful), it was time to recognize some of the great operators in Nebraska. The Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services recognized 3 operators this year. The first operator recognized was Elvin Vavra with the Village of Homer. The next two operators recognized were the husband and wife duo of Rene and Joy Nelson with Urban Utilities Inc. All three operators were very deserving of these awards and were very proud to be recognized.

The Annual Best Tasting Water Contest was held during lunch on Tuesday. The winner of this contest was also recognized at the banquet. Adam German with the Village of Cortland took home the top prize honors. Congratulations, Adam! Hopefully Cortland's water becomes Nebraska's second national champion.

This year the Nebraska Rural Water Association handed out its "Friend of Rural Water" Award. Richard "Dick" Frankforter with MaGuire Iron was this year's recipient. Dick has been a fantastic supporter of rural water and has also spoken at several one day training sessions. He provided the primer and paint for our water tower that highlights the Nebraska Rural Water Association office property. Thanks, Dick, and congratulations!

The final award of the evening was a new award. As most of you know, the Nebraska Rural Water Association lost Circuit Rider Russell Topp in December. Russ was known by most operators or communities throughout Nebraska and was very well respected as a technical assistance provider. For those who knew Russ he had a few favorite sayings that he would use when providing assistance. One of those sayings was "if you're going to do it, do it right." So with that, the Nebraska Rural Water Association created the "Russ Topp, Doing It Right Award". Everyone who attended the banquet was honored with the presence of Russ' wife Karen who told a wonderful story about Russell. After Karen told her story, Circuit Rider Randy Hellbusch presented the first annual Russ Topp award to Alan Krupicka. Alan is the designated operator of five systems and was very deserving of the award. There are many great water operators in the state of Nebraska. Hopefully they will see the importance of this award and continue to "do it right" and strive to win it!

After the awards banquet, attendees were treated to a few drinks and some fantastic music by the Chad Lee Band. It just seemed to be a great way to end a day full of learning, awards and even a few tears. The Chad Lee Band kept the attendees singing, dancing and just relaxing. We hope to have them back again!!

When Wednesday morning rolled around it was time for the annual breakfast and business meeting. As soon as the meeting concluded, it was time for the training sessions to begin. Many operators were thinking they may have to leave a little early due to a potentially hazardous winter storm that was bearing down on western and central Nebraska. Although some operators did have to leave early, over 200 were still in the seats for the Governor of Nebraska, Pete Ricketts, to address the crowd. Governor Ricketts addressed the crowd with his emphasis on the importance of the responsibilities water operators have. Getting to meet Governor Ricketts was a tremendous honor for all of us at the Nebraska Rural Water Association but it also showed he does care about who we are and what we all do as water operators. Thank you, Governor Ricketts.

Wednesday's lunch concluded with the raffle drawings. Some of the big winners were Dave Hansmeyer from Firth, Gary Beckler from Grant, Corban Helmandollar from Fort Calhoun, Don Christen from Burwell, Adam Darbro from Aurora, Alan Potter from Ewing and John Schutte

from Nelson. There were some very nice prizes to be won and I hope all the winners enjoy them. Most of all, thank you for purchasing the raffle tickets, it helps a lot with the conference.

Finally, as I look back at the 2016 conference I feel it was the best one that I have had the honor of being a part of. Operators came by the hundreds, the Younes Center is second to none, the Younes Center staff is amazing, but most of all it takes a team to make a conference like this successful! The teamwork of the Nebraska Rural Water Association board and staff, Salli, Carol, Amy, Mike Lucas, Mike Stanzel, Barney, Randy and Doug, played the most important part in making this great conference happen! Thank you to all of you!

Now let's get ready for 2017.