

## 40<sup>th</sup> Celebration

By Pat Petersen, Training Specialist

Forty years of Nebraska Rural Water Conferences! Think how much knowledge has been passed on during all of those events! What a fantastic organization! It's a privilege for me to be a part of it and be able to put together one of the largest training events for water operators throughout the state. The faces may have changed at the conference but the support structure of the vendors, operators and communities still shines as bright as the first conference. Here are some of the highlights of the big 4-0!

Monday, March 12, at 7 AM it all began. Roses for You was putting up the vendor booths and the rest of us were unloading and organizing our trailer full of conference goodies. Before we knew it the Pledge of Allegiance was spoken and we were on our way! As usual, the Regulation Update presented by Monitoring and Compliance Manager, Becky Schuerman, kicked things off and was followed by Dr. Bill Podraza. Bill has been a part of many Nebraska Rural Water conferences and always received "rave" reviews for his presentations. This year Bill chose to speak about the topic of "millennials." His presentation was excellent and little did he know that at lunch on Tuesday he would be given the "Friend of Rural Water Award," for his many years of volunteering, sponsoring and exhibiting at so many conferences. Bill plans to retire this year so on behalf of the Nebraska Rural Water Association, I thank you. Best of luck with retirement! Just remember, I will always have a spot for you if you feel like you would like to present!!

Rich Koenig finished off our busy Monday with a presentation, Planning for Change/Change in Planning? This presentation has been well received because it can open your mind a little bit and help us prepare for any roadblocks that may suddenly appear in our path. As always, Rich did a great job and also helped me out when one of my scheduled presenters was unable to attend. Thanks, Rich!

After our Monday night meal, the Annual Fun Night was held at the Big Apple Fun Center. JEO spearheaded the event with the help of HOA, Sargent Drilling, Miller and Associates and the NeRWA. This event continues to grow and be very successful! Thank you to all of those who took the time to create such a fun event! The operators really seem to enjoy it!

Tuesday's training sessions began with several choices of roundtable discussions. The roundtable discussions seem to be a good way to "break the ice" and to get the long day of training moving in the right direction. Throughout Tuesday, a variety of speakers took the stage. Some of the new presentations included Licensed vs. Unlicensed SCADA Systems, Level Measurement Challenges, Lift Station Buyer's Guide and Health Benefits for Operators. There were a couple other new presenters on the agenda but due to unforeseen circumstances, they were unable to attend and present. Hopefully they can try again next year. I'm always looking for new faces and topics!

On the subject of topics, if there is anything you would like to see addressed at our conference or one day training sessions, feel free to contact me. Your input is greatly appreciated. According to our evaluations, some operators were asking about new backflow topics and possibly putting them in different time slots. We will see what we can do!

At the conclusion of the Tuesday afternoon classes, operators were treated to a social hour sponsored by Core and Main. The social hour was held in the exhibit hall so operators and vendors could talk about the day.

Following the social hour, it was time for the evening meal and banquet. The banquet meal was delicious and consisted of prime rib, shrimp and all the fixin's! Following the meal it was time for the awards ceremony. The Department of Health and Human Services delivered the first award. Reece Jensen with the City of Sargent was honored with "Operator of the Year" award. Field Rep. Doug Woodbeck filled in for Tony Martinez to deliver the award. Keep up the good work, Reece!

Every year at the annual conference there is the "Nebraska's Best Tasting Drinking Water" contest. This year the winner was the City of Clay Center. Kevin Thompson accepted the award for the city. Kevin explained to the crowd about the week he had had prior to the conference including two water main breaks and the installation of new pipe because of it. Kevin was very grateful and happy to have won the award. Thank you to the judges of the contest! The judges were Rita Shea, Cope Clark, Ken Deason, and Anthony Fitzgerald.

The final award of the evening was the award given to an operator that "does things right" or as we like to call it, the "Russ Topp Award." For those of you who knew Russ, you knew his motto, "If you're going to do it, do it right." This year Nebraska Rural Water honored Mr. Paul Benitz as the winner of the award. Paul has been with Richardson County Rural Water District #2 since its creation. Paul was very deserving of this award and was a very gracious recipient! Great job, Paul, and I hope you enjoy your retirement. After the awards ceremony drinks and snacks were served along with some great music performed by the Chad Lee Band. Chad and Keith sure know how to keep a crowd smiling.

Wednesday morning started out with a wonderful breakfast and the annual meeting in the Crystal Ballroom. The Nebraska Rural Water Association's President and Board of Trustees which consists of President Tom Goulette and board members Greg Bouc, Larry Wennekamp, Tom Grovijohn, Dennis Hoback, George Wagner and Jordon Bang will remain intact for another year. This board continues to be very supportive of its members and staff and keeps this association standing on "solid" ground!

A quick four hours of learning followed the breakfast on Wednesday. Some of the presentations on Wednesday included Nitrates in our Drinking Water, Health Benefits for Operators, Well Maintenance Plans and two hours of the Operator Quiz and Review. The Quiz and Review has become an instrumental part of our one day training sessions and we thought it would be a good refresher for operators attending the conference. Ralph Naber, Dave Jundt and Bob Byrkit are the DHHS Field Reps that took the time to quiz the contestants. Thanks guys!

Of course, what would the final day of the conference be without the naming of the raffle prize winners? What would a 40<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference be without a table full of awesome prizes to raffle away? A 50 inch HDTV, a Samsung Sound bar, a Bose Wave radio, a portable generator and a stainless steel smoker are just a few of the many prizes. Some of the winners included: Kevin Finnegan, Elvin Vavra, Roger Anderson, Kenny Shaw, Dave Tweedie, Bernie Stych and Jerry Thompson.

So there you have it. Number 40 is in the books! The conference went very smoothly except for the computer that decided it had presented enough late Tuesday afternoon! Thank you, Mary Boden, for being patient and fighting through our technical problems. The Nebraska Rural Water conferences are a fun thing to put together and attend. These conferences would not be possible without the support of

the many vendors that exhibit, operators that attend and, of course, the Rural Water staff. Salli, Amy, Carol and Barney, thanks for putting the entire conference in boxes, and Mike, Mike, Randy, and Ken, thanks for unloading the trailer full of boxes. The Nebraska Rural Water Association team put together one heck of a 40<sup>th</sup> annual conference!

Might as well start planning 41.....