

**2019 Conference**  
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Once again the Younes Conference Center in Kearney, Nebraska held the spotlight for the Nebraska Rural Water Association's Annual Conference. The conference dates were May 11-13, and throughout the three days over 350 operators made their way through the halls of the beautiful conference center. 57 exhibitors lined the maze of booths in the Crystal Ballroom providing their expertise on several different lines of products in the water and wastewater field. With these kind of numbers, the annual conference continues to be the largest training opportunity for water and wastewater operators in the State of Nebraska!

Tom Goulette, the president of the NeRWA operating board, kicked things off Monday afternoon with the Pledge of Allegiance and a brief update of the association. Sue Dempsey, the new drinking Water Administrator at DHHS, and Andy Kahle, Field Services Manager, provided the annual regulation update and discussed any changes that have taken place in the department in the past year. Rich Koenig, DHHS Field Rep, and Dennis Watts with the City of Norfolk provided an update on NeWARN, and how well we know our water systems. Marty Norton and Denise Meeks provided a USDA/RD update to conclude Monday's session.

A delicious supper was served to everyone before heading over to the Big Apple Fun Center. Monday night has been a time for operators to relax, visit or even take part in the activities of the Annual Fun Night. Miller and Associates took the lead for the fun night this year. Other contributors to the annual event included Sargent Drilling, JEO Consulting Engineers, HOA Solutions and the Nebraska Rural Water Association. The support of this event continues to grow and we all know it couldn't happen without the supporting cast of these five contributors. Thank you, and as always, we look forward to another great "fun night" next year!

Tuesday has traditionally been the big day for learning at the conference. Operators are given the opportunity to attend six hours of classes in a variety of topics. Some of the topics included water tank maintenance, meters, social media crash course, flow measurement, leak detection, safety and backflow items. On the topic of backflow, over the past several years operators have mentioned that we need "new" topics and why do we put the backflow classes back to back on Tuesday? If any operators have any ideas of what they would like to see in a backflow class, please call me or email me and I will see if it meets the criteria to receive an hour of credit. Secondly, the order of classes, all five in a row, simply allows Grade 6 operators to receive all of their hours in one day. We may try to spread them out next year and see how this goes. This way operators may be able to attend a better variety of classes.

During lunch on Tuesday the annual Best Tasting Drinking Water contest was held. This year there were ten entries. That's a lot of water to taste right after lunch! After all of the dust had settled, the judges determined that the City of Auburn has Nebraska's best tasting drinking water this year. Congratulations to Ken Swanson and his crew in Auburn! Last year's best

tasting water went to Clay Center, Nebraska and it claimed the silver medal for the best tasting water in the United States! Congratulations to Kevin and Jordan in Clay Center!

Six hours of learning makes for a very long day so then it was time for a social hour before the banquet. Thanks to Core and Main for providing the refreshments at this year's social hour.

Following the social hour, the annual awards banquet and entertainment took center stage. Each year the Department of Health and Human Services, Division of Public Health, Drinking Water presents a water operator of the year award. This year the department felt two operators were worthy of this award. Congratulations to Milo Rust with the City of Chadron, and Kevin Holcomb with the City of Loup City. These two gentlemen were well deserving of this award and we wish them the best of luck in the future.

After the state presented their awards, the Nebraska Rural Water Association took a moment to honor the memory of one of our own, the annual "Doing it Right Award," in memory of Circuit Rider Russ Topp. This year's recipient was Clint Johnson with the City of Pawnee City. Clint is an outstanding representative for Pawnee City. Clint received his award surrounded by several family members that secretly showed up for the banquet. Congratulations, Clint!

When the awards banquet had ended, Chad Lee took the stage and entertained the audience with some great music. All those in attendance enjoyed a free beverage (or two) and snacks while the music played. Thanks, Chad, and all of those who attended!

Wednesday morning started off with the operator breakfast and the annual board meeting. It was a great way to start the final day of a very busy Wednesday. After attending the first morning sessions, operators were asked to gather in the Diamond Ballroom for a special guest. Governor Pete Ricketts made a quick stop at the conference and gave a quick presentation about AG Week and the importance of agriculture in the great state of Nebraska. This was a great late addition to our busy agenda. Thank you, Governor Ricketts!

Wednesday classes then resumed with a few shortened classes and lunch. The raffle prizes were awarded during the lunch break. Thanks to all that enjoy taking a chance to win one of the many great prizes included in the raffle giveaway. This tremendous support is greatly appreciated.

With Mother Nature bearing down on central Nebraska, and already wreaking havoc on the western end of the state, it was time to get the operators on their way safely to their respected communities. Some were able to get home and some had already made reservations to stay in Kearney until the storms were over.

So once again, at the end of the conference I would like to take some time to thank some very special groups. First of all the sponsors; PLATINUM: Municipal Supply, GOLD: Sargent Drilling and Nebraska 811, SILVER: Core and Main, Olsson Associates and Vessco, BRONZE: HTM, Iowa Pump Works, Johnson Service, Lincoln WinWater, Maguire Iron, Miller and Associates and

Municipal Automation. Game Night sponsors were JEO, HOA, Miller and Associates, Sargent Drilling and the Nebraska Rural Water Association. Your generosity this year, in the past, and hopefully in the future always makes a great conference even greater!

Finally, the board and staff here at the Nebraska Rural Water Association are second to none. Planning a conference can be kind of a daunting task but with the help of so many great co-workers and bosses, it is actually kind of fun! Mike Lucas, Mike Stanzel, Randy Hellbusch, Scott Finke, Ken Halvorsen, Barney Whatley, Salli Kemerling, Amy Kemerling and Carol Jasa, thank you! This would not work without any one of you! Also a big thank you to our operating board, Jordon Bang, Tom Goulette, Tom Grovijohn, Greg Bouc, George Wagner, Larry Wennekamp, and Dennis Hoback, each one of you provides any kind of assistance I have ever needed and it is greatly appreciated.

Finally, I would like to wish a happy retirement to outgoing board member Mr. Dennis Hoback. I hope you and Donna can enjoy many years of retirement life! Also, please welcome our newest board member, Cope Clark from Cedar Knox Rural Water Project.

By the way, next year's conference will be held March 9-11, 2020 at the Younes Conference Center again. Hopefully Mother Nature is in a better mood.....