

Western Conference Reflections

By Pat Petersen, Training

With the long, hot, summer days behind us and the colors of fall appearing, it was once again time for the Nebraska Rural Water Association staff and board members to head west. It was fall (Western) conference time. As an operator in the eastern half of the state I never attended the fall conference. It just seemed so far away! So, not only was this my first fall conference to attend, I, also, had the honor of planning it!

Monday, September 16th we all arrived at the Gering Civic Center to get things ready for a busy week. The pre-conference was scheduled for Tuesday morning. Katie Miller, Program Manager with the Environmental Finance Center at Wichita State University was our featured speaker. The pre-conference consisted of five critical components of asset management. The components consisted of: 1. The current state of assets, 2. Level of service, 3. Critical assets, 4. Life cycle costing and 5. Long term funding strategies tied in with the implementation of asset management. Katie did a fantastic job with her presentation. Several classroom discussions were held and created a great learning environment for all operators who attended.

At the conclusion of the pre-conference the operators and staff headed for the Riverview Golf Course. The beautiful weather brought close to 40 participants and several prizes were awarded. Conference exhibitors also sponsored certain holes, offering even more chances for the players to win prizes. The Nebraska Rural Water Association would like to thank all of those who participated and those who contributed. It was a fantastic time!

On Wednesday morning, operators had two choices for starting their day: either go to the trap shoot or take their bike for a spin on a poker run. 22 operators and staff chose to shoot and another 15 went riding in the poker run. It was a great morning for both outside events and a good way to get the day started before the conference began at 12:45.

NDHHS Drinking Water and Environmental Health Administrator Jack Daniel kicked the conference off with the regulatory update. Rich Koenig and Kristin Luebbe with NDHHS each gave presentations Wednesday afternoon. Rich's presentation gave us the "Characteristics of an Outstanding Operator" and Kristin touched on "Emergency Planning". The learning part of the day ended with Ryan Chapman with NDEQ giving us an update on Source Water Protection funding.

Wednesday's classes were followed by a social hour, banquet and awards. Two outstanding operator awards were given out by NDHHS Field Services Manager Doug Woodbeck. The two recipients were Dave Christian with the Harrisburg Water System and Scott Smith with the City of Oshkosh. Congratulations to both of these outstanding operators!

Operators were met with the smell of sausage, eggs, pancakes and hash browns at 6:30 AM on Thursday morning in the Gering Civic Center. The annual breakfast was a great way to start a day full of learning.

Sessions began on Thursday morning at 7:30 AM and concluded at 4:45 PM. Some of the presentations were an update from Digger's Hotline, Small System Round Table, Trenching and Excavation, and of course, a full slate of backflow and cross-connection education. Over the three days 127 people attended the conference and hopefully you all had something to take with you that would help you as an operator, board member, clerk, or any other occupation involved with the drinking water profession.

I want to take this time to give special thanks to Salli and Carol for all of their help getting the booklets and registration items ready; Randy, Russ, and Mike Stanzel for making the golf tournament and trap shoot complete successes; Barney for helping set up the computers and projectors in the classrooms; Mike Lucas for never letting his camera get out of reach and Doug Allen and Jack Satur for organizing the poker run. I also want to thank all of the NeRWA Board members that were able to attend: Gene, Greg, Larry, and Dale. Thanks! Finally, a big thank you goes to the exhibitors and presenters who took the time to be with us. The NeRWA would not be able to do this without your support.

