

2015 Fall Conference Rundown

By Pat Petersen, Training Specialist

Although it is called the “Fall Conference,” I believe when I pulled into Gering on Monday, September 14th, the thermometer on my car said 96 degrees. It was downright hot! Despite the heat the Gering Civic Center was once again the site of the Nebraska Rural Water Association’s “Fall” Pre-Conference and Conference.

This year’s pre-conference was entitled “The Future of Your Water System.” Five different items that may affect the future of water operators and their systems were on the agenda. 1. Charles Bausch with HD Supply addressed the crowd first with his Utility Technology presentation. As we all know, technology is always changing and for all of us in the water industry, it was fun to see what is out there to benefit our systems. 2. A budget is a vital part of running a water system so Randy Hellbusch with the Nebraska Rural Water Association gave his presentation on the proper ways to build a budget around a water system. 3. Keith Broman with Sargent Drilling has helped several communities and operators learn about the benefits of installing VFD’s or Variable Frequency Drives on their municipal wells. Not only can a system save money but also save wear and tear on equipment. 4. Layne Christensen’s Dan Freese then showed the steps it takes when siting and planning for a new well. Water wells do not last forever and we know there are several steps to follow when it is time to drill a new well. This presentation showed us just that. 5. The final speaker of the pre-conference was Rich Koenig, field area 3 rep. for the Department of Health and Human Services. Rich’s presentation focused on what it’s going to take to fill the shoes of water operators throughout the state that retire or change jobs. Water operators have one of the most important jobs in the State of Nebraska and when we need to replace them we need to do it right by finding just the right person! Over 40 operators participated in the pre-conference!

Following the pre-conference was the operator golf outing. Once again, the weather was more like that of a summer day, but it was a perfect day for several operators to show off their golfing skills. Sixteen teams took part in the fun afternoon and each team received some sort of prize money thanks to these sponsors: Baker and Associates, HD Supply, Johnson Service, M.C. Schaff and Associates, Municipal Supply, Sargent Drilling, Utility Service, Maguire Iron, Midco Diving and Miller and Associates. The championship flight winners were Mike McKee and Steve Kelley. Way to go guys!

Wednesday morning kicked off with the annual trapshoot that was sponsored by Bill Simmerman with Municipal Automation. Championship flight winners were Mike Wentink and Tommy Rudder. Also taking place on Wednesday morning was the poker run which was won by Martin Staab. Thanks to those of you who participated and for the sponsors of each event! These things couldn’t be done without you.

At 12:30 PM Wednesday afternoon it was finally time to get this conference up and going. Howard Isaacs, the new Drinking Water Administrator for the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services gave the annual Regulatory Update followed by Bill Podraza with Miller and Associates who advised water operators on how to address their village boards and city councils. Rich Koenig completed Wednesday's agenda with a presentation about a certain situation that he personally was involved with. WE DON'T KNOW WHAT HAPPENED! NOW WHAT? A certain water system's security had been compromised. He and the operator had no idea how far the culprits may have gone so he described the steps it took to issue a "Do Not Consume" order.

A social hour sponsored by HD Supply and the awards banquet took place Wednesday evening. Two operators from the western part of the state were honored with Outstanding Operator Awards. The two recipients of the awards were Dave Smith from the City of Bridgeport and Rod Klein with the Village of Farnam. Congratulations, Dave and Rod. You are both very deserving of this fantastic award!

On our final day of the conference, operators were treated to a wonderful breakfast before a long day of learning. Training sessions were held from 8:30 AM until 3:30 PM. Yes, it was a long day of learning but it was a great opportunity to obtain 6 water hours, 6 wastewater hours, 5 backflow, and 5 well driller hours. Overall the entire conference and pre-conference offered 15 water, 5 backflow, 11.5 wastewater hours and 9 well driller hours. Hopefully everyone was able to obtain what they needed.

Several vendors provided door prizes that gave those in attendance a chance to take something nice home. Door prizes were drawn every break and a lot of people took some very nice things with them as they left the conference. Vendors who supplied the NeRWA with door prizes were: Sargent Drilling - two pullover windbreakers, Barco - hip waders and several decks of cards, Maguire Iron - ammo box, clock radio and a shooting rest, Elliott Equipment - flashlight, Hawkins - blanket and cooler, Municipal Supply - several hats and Municipal Automation - several pairs of gloves and tri-fold calendars. Thanks again to all of you who donated and to all of you who took the time to exhibit. The exhibit hall was full every break!

Finally, a big thank you to the crew who puts it all together. Salli, Carol, Amy, Mike Lucas, Mike Stanzel, Randy, Barney, and Doug, thanks! NeRWA Board members who were able to attend, I want to thank you for your support and lending a helping hand when we need it. I think we have a great team here at the Nebraska Rural Water Association! With that being said and speaking for the Nebraska Rural Water Association Board and staff, I hope to see all of you at the Annual Conference in Kearney, Nebraska on March 21-23, 2016. Have a safe and happy winter!