

The Trek West

By Pat Petersen, Training Specialist

A lot of people look forward to September because of the fall colors beginning to appear, Husker football and kids going back to school. To me, September means heading west and seeing the operators that I don't get to see too often but wish I could visit more. September 12-14 was the week of the Western Conference in Gering, and once again the support shown by the operators in the panhandle was remarkable!

The format of this year's conference was similar to those in the past. The pre-conference took place on Tuesday and the full conference went from Wednesday afternoon until Thursday afternoon. Over 130 operators filled the halls of the Gering Civic Center along with 25 vendor booths. Something new this year at the pre-conference was a two hour session called the Operator Review. This presentation was put together by Field Reps Ralph Naber, Bob Byrkit and Dave Jundt. It is a question and answer session that provides operators a chance to discuss certain areas of being a water professional. Since we were in the western half of the state, Field Reps Tony Martinez and Doug Woodbeck along with the help of Ralph Naber handled this presentation. This session has become an integral part of the training classes that I provide and has been well received by the operators, according to the evaluations that are completed at the end of each of the sessions. Heck, who couldn't use an hour or two just to brush up on things that may have slipped our mind.

Golfers hit the golf course Tuesday afternoon for some fun and prizes. Over 35 teams participated and I would have to say that everyone enjoyed themselves. Some of this year's top golfers were Brett Melson, Randy Rudder, Nick Martin, Derek Olson, Jeff Kettleon, Ronnie Stewart, Steve Kelley, Monte Dakan, Graham Fisher and Ames Hartung. Several vendors chose to sponsor a hole for the golf tourney which allows the NeRWA to provide prizes for most of those who participate.

Wednesday morning started with a rumble and a bang with the annual poker run and trap shoot. 10 riders hit the road around 8 AM and over 20 participated in the trap shoot. 4 hours of learning took place after all of the fun, starting with Drinking Water Administrator Howard Isaacs, followed by Bill Podraza with Miller and Associates and concluding with Field Rep Rich Koenig with an exceptional presentation on "Planning for Change."

Following Rich's presentation, a Social Hour sponsored by Core and Main (formerly HD Supply) was held allowing the operators to unwind before a delicious meal and awards. The NeRWA gave away several fun prizes that had an outdoor theme: coolers, flashlights, multi-tools, a fishing pole, and a game camera to name a few. Some of those winners were Gary Eckman, Andrew Stratman, Alan Krupicka, Shawn Anderson and Tommy Case.

Andy Kahle and Doug Woodbeck presented Mr. Ricky Dickinson from the Village of Bushnell with the Outstanding Water Operator Award. Ricky does a tremendous job for the Village and is very dedicated to doing a great job. Keep up the good work Ricky, and congratulations!

Thursday started with a fantastic breakfast at the civic center and then an early start to learning. Classes ran from 7:30 AM until 3:30 PM. The classrooms were full all day long and the operators had a wide

variety of topics to sit in on. Hopefully they learned something new and helpful, whether it was in the classroom or just from visiting with vendors, operators and even the NeRWA Staff.

One of the fun things about the Western Conference is the all-day suspense an operator may have as they hope to win a door prize. The vendors provide several different items for operators to win. If you are registered to attend the conference, you have a chance to win! This year the generosity of the vendors was amazing once again. Items donated by the vendors were as follows:

Sargent Drilling - 2 pullover wind breakers

Maguire Iron - cooler, gun cleaning kit, gerber knife and \$100

Elliott Sanitation - Yeti cooler, pullovers, golf balls and hats

Municipal Supply - hats

Municipal Automation - gloves and coffee cups

Johnson Service - Bean Bag Game

Hawkins - hats

Core and Main - fire hydrant cookie jars

Miller and Associates - stainless coffee mugs

Thank you again to all of those who donated items. The conference would not be as successful if it was not for the vendors and exhibitors taking part in the door prize drawing!

With the Western Conference in the books, it's time to look forward to our Annual Conference slated for March 12-14, 2018 in Kearney once again. This year the Nebraska Rural Water Association will be celebrating its 40th conference!! We hope to make this year's conference one of the best experiences for the water and wastewater professionals throughout the State of Nebraska. Stay tuned, it's going to be a good one!