Each year brings the FSAWWA a new slate of officers, a new dynamic, and a new set of challenges and opportunities to face. All of the many resources of the section, including its finances, will be engaged: past chairs, officers, support staff, and most importantly, its members. And all of these members are associated for a primary purpose: provide safe, reliable, affordable drinking water to their customers, the citizens of the state of Florida. This coming year, as your new chair, I’d like to share some ideas we have and actions we’re taking to serve this purpose.

Ambassador Program

As with many associations, membership in FSAWWA has slipped during the economic slowdown. This trend must reverse. During the term of our Past Chair Jason Parrillo, the Ambassador Program was established under the leadership of our current Chair-Elect Mark Lehigh to provide outreach, primarily to utilities, regarding their level of participation in our section. Ambassadors have been selected, assigned to various utilities, and are currently being equipped with statistics and membership benefit materials. As the new year begins, calendars will fill up with face-to-face meetings between utility officials and section ambassadors.

I issue a call out to all of our members: If you think your utility would benefit from a personal meeting with our ambassadors, please contact Mark Lehigh (lehighm@HillsboroughCounty.org) or Executive Director Peggy Guingona (fsawwa@gmail.com). They will assure that a timely meeting is scheduled with your utility.

Mentoring Program

Now for the latest initiative: the FSAWWA Mentoring Program. Our section has identified a shortcoming that hurts membership recruitment and retention: too much time elapses between a member signing up and then becoming fully integrated into the association. Those members who don’t “connect” will “disconnect.” Recruiting members must be followed by a strong retention effort.

Opportunities abound for new members to participate in ways that make a difference. But connecting new members with those opportunities hasn’t been effective for all of our new members. A mentoring of new members by “veterans” was chosen as the best way to facilitate that effort.

At the section’s strategic planning retreat this past October, 18 members (nine pairs connected as mentor/mentee) began the inaugural mentoring class. They’re talking, emailing, meeting face-to-face, eating together, and most importantly, they’re sharing knowledge, wisdom, and contacts. Guidelines for effective pairings and ideas for personal contacts are being assembled for an expanded program beginning this year.

Sign-up forms for participation will be posted on the section’s website this month. Please give serious consideration to your participation as a mentor or mentee.

Also, please feel free to contact me anytime this year. I would enjoy talking with any of our members or prospective members. Your section is as open as ever to new ideas to better serve our primary purpose: supplying safe, reliable, and affordable drinking water to the citizens of Florida!

Last but not least—Jason Parrillo, you provided great leadership this last year. Thank you so much for your exemplary service to the section!