A Message from ABPA President Frank Snyder

Association elections are coming soon - and we need YOU to help make them successful

As I compose this, our nation has a new President-elect. If you support the new President, you are happy. If not, you tolerate the administration for four years, until the next election. Now each of us will see whether the election was a benefit or a hinderance to the issues affecting drinking water and our livelihoods.

We’ve heard all the claims, and denials, of voter fraud. But I still haven’t seen any evidence. Elections must be above reproach, regardless of who conducts the vote or what it’s for. Our system is designed so each member, resident or citizen gets one vote for candidates or issues. Election officials and lawmakers are expected to make the process as simple and secure as humanly possible.

ABPA will begin its election process in the near future. You members voted to approve our bylaws, which detail how our vote is conducted. It is the responsibility of the Election Committee and Board of Directors to ensure that process is followed.

Soon the request for nominations will be posted on our website and sent to members, as required in the bylaws (which can be found at our website: abpa.org/resource/resmgr/Bylaws/ABPA.pdf). Region directors will be elected this year in our odd-numbered regions (1, 3, 5, 7, 9 and 11).

I would love to see two or three candidates for each directorship. Short of that, I’ll be happy if we can at least get one candidate for EVERY seat, including those that are now vacant.

Region director duties are also spelled out in our bylaws. The region director is your representative on the national board. If your region does not have a director, it has no voice in how ABPA is run. Now is the time for you to step forward to fill a region director position – or to help find someone who will accept the challenge.

For those of us who do have a region director, it’s our responsibility to know what his or her duties are and to ensure they are representing you the way you want. If you do not agree with something, call or email your region director. Do not be rude or abusive. You are trying to sell them on your side of the issue. If you’re not satisfied with the resolution – or think you could do a better job – run against them.
If you are in even-numbered regions 2, 4, 6, 8, 10 or 12, you have until 2022 to vote. However, now is still the time to start preparing for that election.

We will also elect a new national vice president in 2022. Again, our ABPA bylaws spell out the required qualifications. One of them is, you must have attended a Board of Director’s meeting to be eligible for a national position.

I believe this is a member-run organization and we are responsible to all members. Therefore, board meetings are noticed in advance – in accordance with our bylaws – and are open for any member to attend.

With COVID-19 still running rampant – and travel restrictions and warnings continuing everywhere – all board meetings will remain virtual for now. You can attend from the comfort of your living room.

So, with no excuse for not meeting our qualifications, I encourage everyone to get active in the ABPA election process when the call for nominations is published.

A Message from ABPA Vice President Blake Anderson

Five key elements needed to build an effective cross connection control program

I believe it’s critical for each public drinking water system across our country to establish and enforce a cross connection control program. Furthermore, for those programs to succeed, I think they require five key steps:

- Establish a local authority
- Provide awareness through public education
- Maintain a well-trained staff
- Keep records and documentation
- Operate an effective enforcement policy

Successfully implementing these cross connection control program components will help prevent water system contamination. I would like to discuss each one in more detail.

**Local authority**

This should consist of a code, ordinance, bylaw or other legal provision, established by the water utility’s governing body. This document’s language should authorize the drinking water utility to conduct a cross connection program.

This code should address: required notification of installed assemblies and devices, authority to require inspections, surveys, assembly and device testing, required protection from cross connections, authority to discontinue service to non-complying connections and enforcement methods.

The individual responsible for the program, and enforcement of the program’s policies, should also be clearly identified in the document. Water utilities should review and update this code every couple of years.
Public Education & Awareness
A good public awareness campaign should educate the general public on:
- What cross connections are and how they can be prevented
- What types of protections are available
- What thermal expansion is and how it can be addressed

Water utilities providing year-round residential service are required to educate customers by issuing annual water quality (consumer confidence) reports. These provide a great opportunity to educate the public about cross connection and backflow conditions. Utilities can also offer the public classes, open houses, safety fairs and school outreach programs.

Moreover, in this age of technology, water utilities should maintain an attractive and detailed website, along with an active social media presence (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram). Remember to document your education and community awareness efforts, maintaining those records for at least five years.

Trained Staff
Each public drinking water system should provide annual training and have at least one trained cross connection control specialist. It’s best if all water system staff members receive basic backflow and cross connection control training. I also recommend all water utilities have a certified program administrator.

Additionally, it’s important to develop relationships and partnerships with your local health, fire and building departments. These associations will pay dividends during preconstruction meetings, emergency responses and in building permit or business license reviews. Remember to document the annual training you and your staff receive.

Record Keeping
Thorough record keeping of your system’s cross connection hazards is also critical. Records should be maintained concerning: surveys and inspections, locations of assemblies, devices and high hazard air gaps and backflow incidents. Test reports and photographs are also important.

Like a news story, backflow incident records should answer who, what, when, where, why, and how a misstep occurred. Annual staff training dates and general public cross connection and backflow outreach efforts should be recorded.

Also, keep a record of all corrective actions taken for at least five years. In fact, I recommend all records be scanned, digitized and maintained indefinitely.

Enforcement Policy
This should include documentation for: annual assembly test reports, high hazard air gap inspections and timely and accurate surveys. For an effective cross connection control program, enforcement actions must be taken when requirements are not met.

Possible enforcement actions will include notice of violation letters for failure to install appropriate protection or failure to test backflow assemblies. Enforcement actions should follow due process and escalate, based upon water system policy, to possible fines and water termination.

Obviously, you should also document all backflow incidents. Annual inspection records are equally critical. Again, remember to keep all documents for at least five years, if not indefinitely.

Hopefully, implementing these cross connection control program components will help build and improve your CCC operation.

“Water quality reports provide a great opportunity to educate the public about cross connection and backflow conditions.”

“Like a news story, backflow incident records should answer who, what, when, where, why and how a misstep occurred.”

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Letter from the Editor

Ah...2021 - in like a lion, hopefully out like a lamb

By Carl Fauver, Communication Director

OK – let me say up front – in this seemingly always divided world we live in these days, I am 100%, lock, stock and barrel on the “wahoo, we finally have a vaccine” side of the fence. I typically poo-poo vaccines. For starters, I HATE NEEDLES! I’ve occasionally fibbed to the family when they ask “Did you get your flu shot?” (don’t tell them). But not this time. Where does that line form?

Regardless of whether you plan to get your shot, I think all of us can agree, it will be nice if 2021 is “better” than last year. Your ABPA chapters have been scrambling for 10 months now, trying to provide membership benefits in a world determined not to cooperate. At the end of this newsletter, we’ll share updates on what was done in Iowa and Nebraska.

Ahead of that Chapters’ Corner article you will...

- Learn all about ABPA’s successful, first-ever training webinar
- Meet a Dragon who flew all the way to Alaska – and other places
- Get to know a Hawaiian who was weeks old, in Honolulu, on Pearl Harbor Day
- Pick up tips to avoid making small mistakes, with big consequences, during your backflow prevention assembly tester certification exam, and
- Enjoy your opportunity to use your verbal creativity to earn a “grand prize”

We appreciate the positive feedback we’ve received regarding our 2020 ABPA newsletters. We’re also encouraged to hear, some of you are interested in contributing stories to this quarterly publication. We invite you to share ideas for future articles – or to offer any other comments – at info@abpa.org.

For story ideas, it would be very helpful if you include contact information for one or two individuals who can contribute to an article or would be available for an interview.

With the new year upon us, here’s hoping you traversed 2020 as successfully as possible. Our condolences and best wishes go to those who were impacted by the unprecedented year most acutely.

Now, please save my place in line!

Headquarters Update

Virtual meetings and annual elections are on the horizon

By Patti Fauver, Executive Director

As I write this update, we are just hitting the winter solstice – one of my favorite days of the year. Now, as we progress through winter, we get just a bit more daylight, each day. It seems a very fitting metaphor for this past year!

As we move forward into 2021 – with hope for the end to this historic pandemic in sight – everyone here at the ABPA office wishes continued good health to everyone, and our sincerest sympathies for anyone impacted so far.

Due to the continuing and worsening pandemic, ABPA has had to continue to adjust to the changing landscape of coronavirus restrictions.
2021 ABPA annual conference
Your association will not be able to host an in-person annual conference this year. The likelihood of the pandemic being resolved to allow a face-to-face event is vanishing. ABPA does not believe an in-person conference in April is in the best interest of our members. The country will likely still be in the midst of the pandemic, although hopefully in the last stages of vaccine distribution.

We are excited to announce, instead, ABPA will host a virtual conference/webinar series on the same dates, April 19-21, 2021. This will be a new experience for all of us. Please stay tuned to your email and the ABPA website for further information.

Board of Directors meeting and annual member meeting
ABPA bylaws require an annual membership meeting to be held during the annual conference. Because our 2021 conference will be virtual, the member meeting will be combined with the Board meeting on April 17, 2021.

This will be a virtual meeting you can monitor by telephone or on your computer. Time and phone-in credential specifics will be finalized in the next few weeks. Again, please keep an eye on your email and the ABPA website for more details.

Elections for odd-numbered region directors
Due to our plan for a virtual conference/webinar series, odd-numbered region director elections will be held separately. As directed by ABPA bylaws, the closing election date will be May 31, 2021.

The call for nominations will be emailed to each ABPA member no later than January 28. The nomination deadline will be exactly one month later, February 28, 2021.

For contested races, ballots and candidate biographies will be sent to each member of those particular ABPA regions, no later than March 28. Completed ballots will then need to be mailed to the Elections Committee Chair by May 31, 2021.

Certifications
Just a reminder to all ABPA certified testers and specialists: automatic certification extensions ended December 31, 2020. However, due to the on-going impact of the pandemic, two recertification options are now being offered through ABPA certification programs.

Nationwide coronavirus mitigation efforts have made it difficult for ABPA testers and specialists to consistently receive adequate and reasonable opportunities to recertify. Your association remains hopeful we will soon be through these challenging times. However, we also recognize a need to offer a “bridge,” until these scheduling challenges are resolved.

ABPA will continue to hold tester and specialist exams wherever possible. We strongly encourage all individuals who need to recertify to sign up for these available, traditional recertification exams. Tester and specialist exams can be found at www.abpa.org/events/event_list.asp.

Therefore, your 2021 recertification choices are:

Option 1: Standard ABPA Recertification – Requires successful completion of a 100-question written exam and performance exam, covering field test procedures on all four assemblies (i.e., RP, DC, PVB, SVB). Successful completion of this exam process grants the standard 3-year recertification.

Option 2: Temporary COVID-19 ABPA Recertification – Requires each individual to participate in a scheduled ABPA webinar, presenting field test procedures for the four assemblies (i.e., RP, DC, PVB, SVB). Group viewing will not be allowed. These webinars will be monitored to assure continual attendance.
During the webinar, attendees will be required to answer all field test procedure and diagnostic questions, to qualify for the Temporary ABPA Recertification. **This temporary COVID-19 ABPA Recertification will extend your certified status for 12 months from the date of the original or extended expiration date.** For more details on this alternative, please visit our homepage (abpa.org).

**Helpful links**
EPA Lead and Copper Rule – On December 22, EPA released the final Lead and Copper Rule Revisions (LCRR). [Click here](#) to access the pre-publication version at 409 pages or the 8-page reference guide.

CDC Waterborne Disease report – In the January 2021 Emerging Infectious Diseases Journal, CDC published a report titled *Estimate of Burden and Direct Healthcare Cost of Infectious Waterborne Disease in the U.S.* [Click here](#) to see the report, estimating the annual cost of waterborne disease to be $2.39 billion.

As we hopefully enter the home stretch of this pandemic marathon, please keep yourself and your loved ones safe – air five!

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**First ABPA Certification Program webinar a success**

**Coronavirus accelerates timeline on an association innovation**

The ancient Greek philosopher Plato is credited with originating the familiar proverb, “Necessity is the mother of invention.” Who knows, perhaps a global pandemic swept through Greece around 400 BC, just as Socrates’ star pupil was tossing off proverbs.

Here in the United States, we’ve seen lots of changes (“inventions”) thanks to coronavirus. Who would have ever guessed an NBA champion would be crowned inside a Florida “bubble?” Or the guy NOT wearing a mask in line at the bank is the one in trouble?

Truth be told, your ABPA Executive Committee had been considering and discussing the introduction of a webinar training series, long before “social distancing” entered our vernacular. But, there’s no doubt COVID-19 pushed that timeline up.

“Since education is the primary focus of ABPA, various people in leadership have been talking about introducing webinars to our members for at least ten years,” association Executive Director Patti Fauver said. “This summer, as COVID raged, (ABPA Certification Programs Administrator) Mike Ahlee suggested we try our first webinar in order to provide members with a refresher on testing procedures. Since all states require CEUs in one form or another, we thought the time was finally right.”

“Education is the focus of ABPA. This was about serving our Members.”
- Patti Fauver

After making all the necessary technical arrangements, the first ABPA Certification Program Webinar was conducted October 24. It was followed by an identical, second session on October 29. And, due to a few technical glitches at the start of the second session, a third was added, November 19. Each ran two hours, with Ahlee moderating while Paul Schwartz and Henry Chang instructed.

“We had a total of 179 people over all three of the webinars,” Fauver added. “Most attendees were in the Pacific and Mountain time zones. At a cost of $25 per person, the webinars generated about $4500 for the association. But, of course, this was not about making the ABPA money. It was about serving our members, particularly given certification restraints the pandemic has put on us.”
Webinar agenda topics included field test demonstrations and discussions for: Double Check Valve, Pressure Vacuum Breaker, Spill Resistant Pressure Vacuum Breaker and Reduced Pressure Principle assemblies.

“For the first one, I thought it went very well,” Ahlee said. “We have been issuing certification extensions during the pandemic; but we knew we needed to do something else. This (webinar) was designed to offer our members an additional service. I was pleased.”

So too, it would seem, were attendees. Among the comments received were: “Perfect speed and good information” ... “Great job, very informative” ... and “It was very good – please do more.”

“I think these sessions were a great springboard for more of them in the future.”
- Henry Chang

“We have been seeing attendance at our in-person training sessions going down in recent years and I think this is a great alternative,” Schwartz added. “Webinars are less of an intrusion on people’s lives.”

Additional webinars are now being scheduled for this first quarter of 2021. ABPA members will be notified by email and details will be posted on the association website (abpa.org).

“Our members have been inquiring about webinars for a long time,” Chang said. “I think these sessions were a great springboard for more of them in the future. Particularly since we don’t know how long COVID will be here, we need to pursue these alternatives.”

Also critical to the webinar’s maiden voyage success was USC computer whiz Daniel Jimenez, who offered technical support throughout all three sessions.

“The (ABPA Executive) Board wants to add value for our members and I think this helps to accomplish that,” Executive Director Fauver concluded. “The success of this webinar clearly shows our members are embracing technology. We look forward to expanding it in the future. This is how people learn today.”

A Message from ABPA Past President Tim Brown

Four-story, single-family homes create backflow protection challenges

A relatively new issue I am addressing in my local position (Albemarle County Service Authority, ACSA, Charlottesville, VA) relates to a residential housing style that’s become very popular in our area: 4-story, single-family homes with all four floors above the water meter connection.

Home designs vary, as you will see in the photos below. The lowest level may be habitable space, a parking garage or a combination of the two. The fourth floors are often little more than a small enclosure adjoining a deck, which may or may not be plumbed. Any 4th level water typically serves a wet-bar or a small bathroom.
I assume this construction style is growing in popularity nationwide, particularly in urban areas, where building “up” more than “out” is necessary to handle population growth and the changing tastes of younger home buyers.

You may have experienced this “new” style of housing in your area for a decade or longer. (I would certainly be remiss to not recognize multi-level apartment living has been a norm in our major urban areas for nearly 150 years).

In my area, we “discovered” this type of construction a few years after it was in place. A change in the county building code – of which we were not made aware – made it difficult for our engineers to properly identify 4-story, single-family homes during their building permit reviews.

Specifically, the structures were being identified as 3-story, with an upper “habitable space.” Once this was discovered, my engineer colleague Alex Morrison worked with builders (four companies working in five subdivisions) to compile a list of all such residences with 4th floor plumbing, but no backflow protection. A total of 87 such homes were identified, requiring retrofitting.

Housing of this design – constructed since our discovery of this issue – is now protected by a double-check backflow assembly. Also, new building permit language now clearly flags these designs for our engineers.

ACSA Rules and Regulations mandate a backflow prevention assembly be installed at the service connection of any structure that is four or more stories. This is consistent with the Virginia Department of Health in their Waterworks Regulations. ACSA requirements do not include mandatory backflow protection on single-family residential structures under four stories, unless the home includes a fire protection or irrigation system.

References to building heights and required backflow protection exist in various state codes across the country. As in Virginia, this typically relates to maintaining a minimum pressure of 20 psi in the distribution system. At a minimum distribution pressure such as this, the downward water pressure resulting from a multi-story building becomes significant.

State and local regulations typically reference four to five floors – or possibly a height of 50 feet, above grade – as the threshold for requiring backflow protection. Based upon a minimum distribution pressure of 20 psi, and an average service depth of three feet, the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power specifies, protection is required “where the highest outlet is more than 46 vertical feet from the service connection.” (My thanks to Paul Schwartz for much of this information).

Returning to the specific situation we face with our 87 Virginia customers, the ACSA Board of Directors agreed to bear the full initial retrofit costs, including permitting, labor and materials. It also included the possible installation of a thermal expansion tank.

Once all information was obtained on the homes – including whether the backflow assembly would be installed in a separate access box behind the water meter, or inside the home near the main shutoff valve – ACSA gathered local plumbing bids. The initial cost estimate was up to $4,000 per home, or nearly $350,000 for the project. Homeowners will bear the financial responsibility for annual backflow assembly tests ($85 to $150 in our area).

A detailed letter was mailed last summer to impacted homeowners. To minimize on-site visits, owners were asked to provide pictures of the area around their water meter, the area around the main shutoff valve, the water heater and thermal expansion tank, if they had one.
After four months, we’ve heard back from about half the homeowners. A few want to eliminate water service to their fourth floor to avoid annual backflow assembly test costs. ACSA must now determine whether this will require fixture removal.

Not all homeowner photos are proving helpful. And the pandemic continues to create scheduling problems for on-site visits. A second round of letters will go out soon, as the project moves frustratingly slow.

It should be noted, typical distribution line pressure in the subdivisions with these homes is 65 to 100 psi. So, the risk of backpressure from a fourth floor is minimal.

I will conclude this saga in an upcoming newsletter, hopefully later this year. In the meantime, I would enjoy hearing from anyone who has dealt with this issue (tbrown@serviceauthority.org or 434-872-3716).

Board Member Profile

Hunter, traveler & Dragon

Rich Koenig is keeping an eye on ABPA Region 12

When we ponder dragons – and, come on, during this locked down 2020 we’ve had plenty of time to do that – most of us probably think of Harry Potter or Game of Thrones. Those of us who are old enough may conjure up Peter, Paul, Mary and Puff.

But out in “America’s Heartland,” at least two people most likely think of a tiny school in northeastern Nebraska – where they fell in love, 45 years ago.

“Diane and I were high school sweethearts, and two of about 70 graduates in the Madison High School Dragons class of 1975,” said ABPA Region 12 (Nebraska, Kansas, Iowa and Missouri) Director Rich Koenig. “I played football and basketball, and ran track. We got married in 1976.”

Parents of three and grandparents to two, the Koenigs will celebrate their 45th wedding anniversary this year. Meantime, Rich marked another anniversary early last year, a few weeks before COVID-19 turned our lives upside down.

“I hit 30 years working for the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services on February 12th (2020),” Koenig said. “I am one of eight water supply specialists. My office is in Norfolk, about 15 miles north of Madison.”

Born and raised in Nebraska, Koenig has lived in Madison 58 of his 63 years. And he’s been “working in water” since before receiving that Dragons diploma.

“I started out in the water well industry, working parttime while in high school,” he said. “Then in 1980 I was hired as the Madison City water operator, in charge of the entire water system for about 2000 people. I worked there for ten years.”

Rich says he might still be with Madison City 40 years later, if not for a suggestion from a dying friend.

“A colleague and mentor, Les Coleman, became sick and asked me to apply for his job with the state of Nebraska,” Koenig explained. “He was in the inspector job I now have. He died a week after I started with the state.”
Just a year after changing jobs, Koenig began his association with ABPA. “My work supervisor encouraged me to become involved in 1991,” he said.

A few years later, Rich became ABPA Region 12 Director, followed by his stint as International Vice President and President (2005-2007).

Since 2012, he’s been back as Region 12 Director, while also serving as chairman of ABPA’s Bylaws Committee. In 2014-15 Koenig was instrumental in a thorough bylaws review, conducted by the ABPA Board of Directors. All of that led to Rich being named the association’s Meritorious Service Award recipient in 2016.

“I support ABPA because the association does a good job of training people,” Koenig added. “As an operator, I have created enough cross connections myself to know they can happen quickly, if you are not careful. I’ve dealt with cross connections several times in my career, but no one has ever gotten sick.”

During their “down time,” Rich and Diane enjoy spoiling their grandkids who each live nearby. He says limited contact with them made 2020 a challenge.

“We have three sons, ages 35, 33 and 30,” Koenig said. “Our unmarried son lives in Missouri, while the two married sons each have one child and each live within 30 miles of us. Our granddaughter turned three last November, and our grandson will turn three in January. We were excited to become grandparents – but COVID has made this year rough.”

Several family members were able to gather for their annual deer hunt this fall. “We’ve been hunting the same private ground since 1987,” Rich said. “We usually get a deer; but we are not so much into that as we are seeing the wildlife. We’ve seen elk, coyotes, bobcats, antelope, even wild turkeys. This year I saw three bald eagles on top of a knoll.”

When they are lucky enough to return home with fresh game, Koenig takes pride in sharing his venison bounty, coast to coast.

“We make deer sticks – like beef sticks – in several flavors: barbeque, jalapeno, cheddar and teriyaki,” he bragged. “A group of us gets together to make the deer sticks ourselves. We’ve shipped them to friends all over the country.”

The Koenigs also drive 4-wheelers and travel. Sometimes Rich rides high in the interstate saddle.

“I have a hobby of driving a semitruck, so I drive up into Montana occasionally,” he explained. “We also took an inner passage cruise to Alaska once. We enjoy sightseeing and have visited a lot of the country. Haven’t been to Hawaii yet, but it’s on our list.”

At this point, Koenig has no firm plans to retire or reduce his involvement with ABPA. But he does have some words of advice for the association.

“We need to engage the younger generation to enter our field,” he concluded. “These are not glamorous positions. But if a young person has the right work ethic, they can become a millionaire in any of the trades: plumbers, testers, water operators. All these trades have

“These Dragons have flown to see much of the world together.”

Rich & Diane will celebrate their 45th wedding anniversary this year.

Rich & Diane will celebrate their 45th wedding anniversary this year.
employee shortages. (ABPA President) Frank Snyder tells a story about showing a group of kids a yacht down in Galveston – owned by a plumber.”

There’s not much call for a yacht in landlocked northeastern Nebraska. But Madison High School Dragons Rich and Diane Koenig may ride off into the retirement sunset on ATVs – or perhaps aboard an 18-wheeler. Either way, you can expect the grandkids to be nearby – perhaps gnawing on a deer stick.

Scholarship Essay Contest

$1500 educational award awaits student who researches and shares backflow prevention information

“In today’s world, where safe drinking water is the most treasured resource, it is imperative water purveyors accept their role and responsibility to enact cross connection control programs to ensure safe drinking water for all Americans.”

That’s how Plano (TX) High School Junior Jishnu Basu closed his scholarship-winning essay, a year ago. Now it’s time to find our 2021 winner of ABPA’s annual Harrington-Arthur Memorial Essay Contest.

Established in 2000, the essay competition rewards students who increase their knowledge and understanding of how cross connection control and backflow prevention help ensure safe drinking water. Backflow prevention programs are essential to ensure the water that reaches your home, school or place of business is as safe and pure as it was when it left the water treatment plant.

ABPA's goal is to educate the public about the value and need for active local backflow prevention programs. The association strives to ensure safe drinking water through cross connection control. The organization works to build a greater public awareness of backflow prevention, as one component of maintaining safe drinking water.

The deadline for the 2021 Harrington-Arthur Memorial Essay Contest is February 28, 2021. The award amount is $1500.

This year's essay topic is:

"Describe the meaning of backflow prevention and how we can keep our drinking water safe through cross connection control. Identify potential hazards commonly found in a typical residential household and discuss actions needed to correct them."

This annual contest is open to all high school students, ages 13 to 18. It is also open to the children, grandchildren and other relatives of ABPA members, with the exception of immediate family members of the ABPA Board of Directors.

We invite you to share essay contest details with your local public or private high school, and with any high school age students who are home schooled.

More detailed information can be found at abpa.org/page/Scholarship.
Past ABPA Meritorious Service Award Winner Profile

No Hawaiian sunset retirement just yet for busy Bill Wong

Out on Oahu – when it was still a territory, long before becoming our 50th state – Bill Wong survived a day “that will live in infamy.” But you’ll have to forgive ABPA’s 2017 Meritorious Service Award recipient for not remembering the Japanese attack that ushered the United States into World War II.

“I was born October 10, 1941 on Oahu, so I was only a few weeks old on Pearl Harbor day,” Wong said. “But my brother, who was nine years older than me, was out shopping that morning and told me all about it.”

While Pearl Harbor Day was a shock for all Americans, Wong, 79, suffered a more personal grief much more recently. Two months ago – on November 4, the day after the presidential election – Bill lost two of his four siblings within 15 minutes of one another… a sister in Hawaii and his only brother, in California.

“It was sad, and so strange, to lose my brother and sister within minutes of one another,” Wong explained. “But my brother was 88 and my sister in her mid-90s. They enjoyed full lives.”

Despite the tragedies that have come and gone in his life, Bill is optimistic, quick with a laugh and busy in “retirement.”

Raised on Oahu, Wong graduated from Iolani High School just a couple of months before Hawaii achieved statehood (August 1959).

“No, that’s not the same school Barack Obama attended,” Wong added. “He went to our rival high school and graduated long after me (Punahou HS 1979).”

Before his career in water protection – and his affiliation with ABPA – Bill spent a decade off the islands, living with his brother in California and earning a civil engineering degree from California State University Long Beach. He spent several years working for City of Long Beach, until his parents intervened.

“Mom and Pop said ‘come back home (to Hawaii)’ – so I did.”

Almost immediately upon returning to Oahu in 1972, Wong hired on with the state department of health as a sanitary engineer. In 1991 he became a program manager for the State of Hawaii Drinking Water Program, a post he held until his 2006 retirement.

“I still write checks, organize meetings and do all kinds of things for the Hawaii Chapter. I am the only crazy one still hanging around.”

“Between my work in Hawaii and Long Beach, I spent more than 40 years in water,” Wong explained.

ABPA came into the picture after Bill’s return from the mainland. He was one of the founders of the Hawaii ABPA Chapter and helped establish the acceptance of ABPA’s Backflow Prevention Assembly Tester Certification in his state.

“ABPA was pretty loosey goosey back in those days,” Wong recalled. “But we were able to get Paul (Schwartz) and Henry (Chang) from the University of Southern California in those early days to offer training classes in Hawaii.”

Needless to say, Bill spent time as the Hawaii ABPA Chapter president. In fact, even now, 14 years into retirement, he remains active with the organization.

“I still write checks, organize meetings and do all kinds of things for the Hawaii Chapter,” Wong said. “I am the only crazy one still hanging around. I enjoy it. I have a good connection.”
In 1976 Bill married his wife Amy. The couple adopted a son from Taiwan and a daughter from Korea. Wong lost his wife to brain cancer in 2011 after 35 years of marriage. Bill’s married children and lone grandchild live near him on Oahu, as do his two surviving older sisters.

Wong still vividly recalls hearing his name announced – at the ABPA national conference, nearly four years ago – as the Meritorious Service Award winner.

“I was so surprised they called my name; in fact, I was debating whether or not to even attend the conference until other members talked me into it,” Bill said. “It was unbelievable, especially since we don’t have as many water systems – only about 130 of them over all seven (Hawaiian) islands – compared to many mainland states. So, I was honored and excited.”

Wong now spends much of his time working as a handyman at the 40-unit senior living center he inherited from his father. He’s lived there since 2016.

“I have enjoyed my association with ABPA and have made many friends. As long as they want me to keep helping out, I’ll be happy to do it.”

“It’s like a cheap motel,” he joked. “My Dad bought the land in 1940 and built the complex in 1995. We provide meals and weekly cleaning for the residents. I do the plumbing and electrical work I can handle.”

Bill also volunteers time to the Salvation Army, where he serves on one of their boards.

“I have enjoyed my association with ABPA and have made many friends,” Wong concluded. “I am glad to still be involved. As long as they want me to keep helping out – and as long as I can – I’ll be happy to do it.”

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Photo caption contest

Something new: ‘Hey, wait a minute, I know the perfect way to describe that!’

Our wonderful world of water... and backflow and cross connections and valves and, well you get it, sometimes produces interesting scenes. So, we thought we would launch our 2021 quarterly ABPA newsletters with a new feature. In short, we want YOU to write the perfect caption for this photo:

If you know where these towers are located, you can tell us that as well. But mostly we're looking for your clever caption (YES, your editor set a low bar for you to clear, as an example).

Please email your caption to info@ABPA.org. Your ABPA management team will select the winner, who will receive a grand prize valued somewhere between a yacht and a pat on the back.

Submit your caption entry by JANUARY 31, 2021!!

ALSO: To keep this quarterly caption contest running, WE NEED YOUR PHOTO SUBMISSION. Please email your most unusual or humorous, industry-related jpg picture to the same address (info@ABPA.org). If we select your photo to use in a future contest, YOU WILL ALSO WIN A PRIZE!

Thanks. We look forward to reading your captions!
Certification Program Update

Hands-on hints: The devil is in the details
By Mike Ahlee, Certification Programs Administrator

I'm sure you've heard the old saying, "Don't sweat the small stuff." Well, when you're taking the "hands-on" portion of the ABPA backflow prevention assembly tester certification exam, that old saying could get you into trouble. Several seemingly small and unimportant details can be considered errors – and cause you to fail – if you don't tend to them carefully.

"Your paperwork is just as important as the field test procedure." Here are a few of the more commonly missed details and the reasons they are considered errors:

First is paperwork. Your paperwork is just as important as the field test procedure. If the field test report form is not properly filled out, it will be considered an error in your procedure. Occasionally, we will see an applicant test a double check valve assembly and write the report on the reduced pressure principle assembly test form. The information may be correct, but if it's on the wrong form, you will fail.

The problem here is, the applicant has misidentified the assembly by writing the results on the wrong form. Each ABPA Performance Exam form is identified for a specific type of backflow prevention assembly: RP, DC, PVB or SVB. Reporting areas are provided, specific to each assembly type.

The RP will have reporting areas for the 1st check valve, 2nd check valve and relief valve; the SVB will have reporting areas for the air inlet valve and check valve; etc. The point is, you must make sure you have filled out the proper field test form.

Next, you must make sure the field test form is filled out properly. The most common error I see is, applicants filling out their report form for the reduced pressure principle assembly. Sometimes, while an applicant is testing the 2nd check valve of an RP assembly, they will write down a numerical value for the 2nd check valve on the report form. Maybe they mistakenly thought they were looking at the pressure drop across the 2nd check. Either way, the proctor must consider this an error.

Be that as it may, if an applicant records a numerical value for the 2nd check during the test of an RP, it is cause for failure. As long as the high side of the field test kit is connected to test cock #2... and the low side is attached to test cock #3... the only value the field test kit will show is the differential pressure across the #1 check valve.

Believe it or not, the next two things are so simple, you wouldn't think anyone could ever miss them. But it happens.

First, is reporting the overall condition of the assembly. Did it pass or fail? On the bottom of the test form in BIG letters you find the words "PASS" and "FAIL." You must check one or the other. If you miss this, YOU fail.

Second, applicants occasionally overlook closing all test cocks, opening the shutoff valves and removing all test equipment, prior to handing in their paperwork. Even though this is something you would never forget in the field, you may be so relieved to be done with the field test procedures, you heave a sigh of relief, hand in your paperwork and say, "I'm done."

Oops! Unless you wrestle that clipboard away from the proctor – then turn the water back on and remove our equipment – you will hear those dreaded words: "You have erred in your procedure."
As you can see, in the world of backflow certification, some things that might first appear insignificant can, upon closer inspection, loom large. So, if you do hear those awful words, “don't focus solely on the physical aspects of the test,” take a good look at your paperwork.

An error in your procedure can mean a paperwork error as well. Here's hoping you never hear those dreaded words.

Happy testing.

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Chapters’ Corner

Two ABPA chapters in the ‘Heartland’ are limping into 2021 like the rest - awaiting a break in the virus to return to a ‘new normal’

As 2020 finally got dragged off, kicking and screaming (and infecting and quarantining and…) most everyone in the ABPA community was glad to see it go. In addition to all the other problems it caused, coronavirus had a huge impact on association chapters all across the country.

In Region 12 (Iowa, Kansas, Missouri and Nebraska) there are two active ABPA chapters. The Eastern Nebraska Chapter (ENCABPA) primarily covers the Omaha and Lincoln areas. The other is an “everybody else” chapter, called the Region 12 Chapter.

Each of these chapters endured challenges during our pandemic year. But, like so many others, they scrambled where and how they could to serve their members in the most effective ways possible.

**Eastern Nebraska (ENCABPA) Chapter**

Two of the primary “movers and shakers” in this chapter are Butch Lottman and Jeremy Hunt. Just a couple of weeks ago, Butch officially retired from his one-man operation, doling out components of his business – Laverne A. Lottman Jr., which specialized in maintaining heavy industrial boiler and chiller systems – to professional associates.

However, Lottman, 65, pledged to continue working as the ENCABPA secretary and treasurer. Additionally, he’ll remain secretary for ABPA Region 12.

“I won’t test anymore; but I will continue to teach seminars to help people get their required continuing education units,” Butch explained. “I may do it for another five years or so. But I am also a pilot, a competitive shooter and an avid fisherman, with a cousin in Alaska. I go up there annually to fish with him. Now I may do that two months a year. But I remain committed to ABPA as well.”

Hunt, meantime, says he has been either the ENCABPA chapter president or vice president for the past eight years. He employs 11 people at his company, Hunt Irrigation.

“We do irrigation and backflow testing,” Hunt said. “We also specialize in outdoor lighting repair, snow removal and other things.”
The ENCABPA normally hosts meetings and continuing education seminars twice yearly, in April and October. COVID-19 wiped out their April session and nearly did the same to the one in October.

“We always hold our fall meetings in a fire department training center south of Omaha; but were told we could not do it in October, because there was not enough room for proper social distancing,” Lottman explained. “But then at the last minute – after I had already notified our members the meeting was cancelled – we learned we could instead meet in the education center, in Lincoln, where we hold our April meetings.”

Even with only a very short time to get the word out about the relocated meeting, Lottman reports 48 people attended and it was a big success, despite the fall coronavirus surge intensifying.

“It was truly unscheduled and I was surprised how many people showed up,” Lottman said. “We sent emails and handed out registration forms at plumbing wholesale houses. I had to hurry to get our speakers lined up again. But I work well under pressure. I’m a disabled vet, with 18 years of military experience. So, we got the job done.”

“I was glad we were able to pull the October 27th meeting off,” Hunt concluded. “People stayed six feet apart, had their temperatures checked and wore masks. We had lots of hand sanitizing stations. One guy attended from DHHS (the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services) and said our safety measures were perfect.”

At the moment, Jeremy and Butch are searching for a new ENCABPA president. And they hope the pandemic will subside enough in April to make their next semi-annual meeting easier to pull off.

Region 12 Chapter

On both sides of the Eastern Nebraska Chapter are active members of the Region 12 Chapter, with membership in western Nebraska and throughout Iowa.

Region 12 Board of Directors members John Lins and Leroy Kramer have served as the chapter’s president and treasurer for ages – Lins since 2000 and Kramer “more than ten years.”

They’ve also been in their current jobs even longer. Lins will hit 30 years with Des Moines Water Works in May, where he is the cross connection control program supervisor and incident manager. Meantime, Kramer has been with the city of North Platte some 43 years, and its water superintendent since 2016.

In March of each year, the Region 12 Chapter hosts a pair of conferences – in Kearney, Nebraska on the first Wednesday of that month, and in Coralville, Iowa, a couple of weeks later. This year, that brief separation in the sessions made all the difference in the world. The Nebraska meeting came off without a hitch (pre-lockdown), while the Iowa meeting was wiped out by coronavirus.

“We were excited to get the March conference in because that is the biggest backflow training session in Nebraska every year,” Kramer said. “We had about 110 people at that conference, which is about average.”

Among the speakers at the March 4 conference were ABPA Region 12 Director Rich Koenig, Retired USC Engineer Paul Schwartz and Jim Purzycki with BAVCO.
Meantime, in Iowa, Lins says everything was in place for his session, until the world came to a halt.

“We get about 100 attendees at our Iowa conference every year, and were all set to go,” he explained. “It’s a very popular meeting. We feed our people the best lunch they can get... give away all kinds of door prizes... provide critical training for certification renewals... and get them out the door by 3 pm, so they aren’t getting home too late.”

Lins now hopes the Iowa session will be possible this March.

“If the pandemic still has things shut down in the spring, we may move our conference to the fall,” John added. “Our people have to complete their continuing education requirements by October 31, so that could still work.”

Like all other ABPA chapter leaders across the country, Butch Lottman, Jeremy Hunt, Leroy Kramer and John Lins each hope it will be easier to serve their members this year, than it was last.