It’s not every day that you witness history being made, and in 2012, FSAWWA made history yet again when the very first woman was named Outstanding Water Treatment Plant Operator of the Year! Kendra Phillips from Pasco County was given this prestigious award at the Florida Water Resources Conference held this past April. The FSAWWA was finally able to recognize Ms. Phillips in front of the Pasco County Board of Commissioners on June 25th. I was fortunate enough to do an interview with Ms. Phillips before the presentation and I would like to share that interview with our membership as it offers a firsthand account from someone engaged with the organization on what the benefits of membership mean to her as an individual.

I have talked about membership benefits and those benefits in action. Now let’s hear directly from an individual member and how she feels about membership with FSAWWA. Ladies and gentlemen, I would like to introduce Kendra Phillips, FSAWWA 2012 Outstanding Water Treatment Plant Operator of the Year.

Jason: Are you aware that you have made history? You are the first woman operator to be named Outstanding Water Treatment Plant Operator of the Year; how does that make you feel?
Kendra: It is really exciting and an honor to be recognized by my peers, and I hope more woman get involved in our industry because of it.

Jason: So, what inspired you to become involved with the water industry?
Kendra: I had a strong science background and I worked for Honeywell in Pennsylvania as a metals analyst for 15 years. When I moved to Florida, I needed to find something different and I felt that by becoming an operator, it would offer me the best of both worlds: being outside working with the treatment systems in the plant and also still being engaged in the analysis and laboratory work that I had enjoyed the previous 15 years.

Jason: Who was responsible for getting you involved with FSAWWA?
Kendra: Marvin Kaden and Kurt Peters were responsible for getting me involved and helped me to network and start my operator career.

Jason: How did they approach you about getting involved with the organization?
Kendra: The County supports all operators to become members. I signed up, met other members, started networking, and it grew from there.

Jason: How would you quantify your experience with FSAWWA and what has the organization done for you as an individual?
Kendra: Networking is the biggest advantage to being a member, and the refresher training that is offered is extremely valuable.

Jason: Do you value your membership with FSAWWA enough that you would recommend membership to someone else?
Kendra: Very much so. Everyone I have met through the organization has been extremely helpful with either providing the right information or pointing me in the right direction to acquire the information I need.

Jason: What are the top three benefits that FSAWWA has offered to you that have helped your career?
Kendra: Networking, training, and the camaraderie. It is a comfort knowing that someone is always ready to help you.

Jason: What would you do to make FSAWWA better?
Kendra: I would like to see more local meetings and potentially more activities after hours for those who may not be able to attend during the work day. For example, those working second or third shift are not able to participate but can definitely benefit from what FSAWWA is offering. Perhaps some specific activities geared towards those operators and topics specific to operations.

I truly appreciated the candor in which Kendra answered the questions. It was obvious she feels strongly about her answers and that means a bright future for FSAWWA and those involved. Take a look again at what the FSAWWA can offer your utility, or you personally, by visiting our website at www.fsawwa.org.

Feel free to navigate around the website to find what interests you, and don’t forget to click the link to the FSAWWA Fall Conference website to see what FSAWWA has ready for you later this year. As a friendly reminder, don’t hesitate to contact any of the board of governors if you should have any questions about becoming involved and being engaged with the organization. As you heard firsthand, the benefits are real, the camaraderie is real, and the rewards, both personally and professionally, will last a lifetime.