Having just completed this year’s Past Chairs Summit on August 28-29, I was reflecting on how far the Florida Section AWWA has come over the past 15 years. From the obvious standpoint, past chairs have provided vision and direction during their year of leadership as section chair; however, there is a good case to be made that those same people have more influence after their respective years as chair. I believe the vast majority of our membership would agree that, overall, section health has fared very well during the global economic crisis that peaked during 2008–2010, and during the ongoing, but slow, recovery. Who do you think positioned the section to achieve such a triumph? The past chairs.

I had stated in my acceptance address back in December that as an organization, we have been truly blessed with outstanding leadership. The more than 85 years of leadership has left the current generation of volunteers and membership of the Florida Section a truly unique environment and in a class all its own. As Florida’s water professionals, we have been given the opportunity to make strategic choices instead of tough choices. This was not by accident and took an immense amount of work, sacrifice, and dedication by our past leadership, volunteers, and membership.

The case to be made is that past chairs have the ability to offer their opinions and advice at a very high value. For example, if any of the past chairs were to take time out of their busy schedules and offer advice on either a specific topic or perhaps the direction of the section, I would most certainly listen. Why? Because the track record of success the section has achieved demands it. The past chairs have my upmost respect because of the sacrifices they have made and the hard work they continue to do. Before the summit existed, most of these encounters either occurred randomly at the different conferences or if a specific meeting were coordinated, which was very rare—and that was if you were lucky enough to catch them!

That is why a new tradition was established during Matthew Alvarez’s tenure as section chair. His leadership and vision gave us the summit, which has become one of the most important events for the section, along with the strategic planning session. The summit provides the current section leadership a one-on-one opportunity to solicit direct feedback from those who molded the section into what it represents today. Past section chair attendees (their year of service is listed) have included, but are not limited to:

- Curtis Stanton – 1960
- Dr. Ignacio Garcia Bengochea 1972
- Dave Tippin - 1981
- Tim Broder -1986
- Robert Claudy - 1987
- Bevin Beaudet - 1990
- Jim Cowgill - 1993
- Almost every single past chair from 1996 to present

How fortunate are we as an organization to have been able to solicit advice from those who served in the position of section chair more than 50 years ago? Most of the past chairs are still very active in the section and the industry, which makes their insight and advice that much more valuable. I look forward to presenting the results of this year’s summit to the board of governors at the FSAWWA Fall Conference.

On a final note, please don’t forget to mark your calendars for the strategic planning retreat to be held either September 26-27 or October 3-4 at the Ft. Lauderdale Beach Resort. The dates are being finalized and will be available via the website at www.fsawwa.org.