Ever since I began my involvement with the Florida Section of AWWA, back in the 1990s, I have been impressed by the professionalism and commitment of our leadership. It has always stood out to me that the section has been fortunate to be led by dedicated chairs who take very proactive roles in its growth and success. Never falling back into the passive “figurehead” trap, it’s this active leadership approach that has set us apart from many similar organizations.

The first section chairs I met were Bob Bai- ley and Luis Aguiar. Both were “on the road” looking for new members and aggressively trying to expand the services, and the customers, of the modest Florida Section. As the years rolled by and Region II began to develop, I have worked under the leadership of many enthusiastic and visionary chairs. In the early 2000s, Larry Ruffin, Jeff Nash, Glenn Yaney, Rob Tegarden, Jackie Torbert, and Matt Alvarez, among others, were particularly encouraging and supportive of my increased commitment and participation in our section.

Over the past 10 years, all of the section chairs I’ve met have played major roles in my personal advancement and in the tremendous growth of our section. I am continuously impressed with the knowledge, commitment, and dedication of these volunteers. Perhaps even more impressive is the fact that these chairs continue to work toward our success far after their terms are over.

In 2008, under Matt Alvarez’s term as chair, our section held its first “Past Chairs Summit” in Orlando. This annual event has grown in attendance through the years and clearly illustrates the value we put on the knowledge and experience of all of our past chairs. It also says a lot about the commitment and loyalty of our past leaders. They sincerely care about the success and direction of the section they helped build and we are very fortunate that these men and women are not content to fade away.

With the helpful and professional coordination of our executive director and her staff, the summit has grown in both participation and value over the past few years. These meetings typically start with networking opportunities and “tale spinning,” followed by a half-day business meeting, This is where we update the past chairs on current issues and strategies and then open up the discussion to hear from them about what we’re doing well and where we might be missing opportunities to improve and to better deliver services to our membership.

In just the past two years we have had the honor of hosting 27 past chairs, and every year they have offered very valuable and constructive perspectives on the section’s direction. One recommendation in particular that has been adopted is an in-depth examination of our goals for the Roy Likins Scholarship. This fund, which truly originated with these past leaders, remains very important to them, and because of that personal investment we have committed to the development of an updated long-term strategy.

Our section has grown into a model of success. I believe we should all be extremely proud that our organization actually seeks out and values the contributions of our past leaders. They not only built this section—they still contribute to its continuous improvement and successful organizational development. We are fortunate indeed!