Spotlight on the FSAWWA Fall Conference

Mark Lehigh
Chair, FSAWWA

What a great fall conference we had this past year. The Manufacturers/Associates Council (MAC) Conference Committee really put together an event packed full of entertainment and value that attracted 1,396 attendees. Congratulations to the MAC and kudos for all their hard work and volunteer efforts!

Let’s talk BBQ! The incoming chair’s reception and first-ever BBQ Challenge was a huge success. Six teams (Omni Hotel, Haskell, Hillsborough County, Garney Construction, Stanley Hydraulic Tools, and Veolia Water NA) competed, while Haskell came away with the overall champion trophy and bragging rights for this year. I think the real winners were the attendees! That was some tasty BBQ provided by all the teams. The menu included chicken, pork ribs, and pork butts (yes, I like pork butts and I cannot lie). Thanks to Richard Anderson and Jeff Nash for planning, organizing, and pulling this off. I can’t wait to see what they put together for next year’s event; knowing them, it will be bigger and better. If you have some thoughts or ideas for this event, Richard would love to hear them. You can find his contact information on the FSAWWA webpage.

And how about that opening general session? Thanks to Kim Kunihiro and Peggy Guingona for bringing in Jim Davidson, who was such a dynamic speaker. Jim was descending Mount Rainier in Washington state in 1992 with a friend when a snowbridge collapsed and dropped them into a glacial crevasse. He gave a gripping tale of survival and the strength it takes to keep climbing despite impossible odds. Jim, a hydrogeologist by trade and mountain climber extraordinaire, captivated the audience, while giving inspiration and motivation for all of us to use in our everyday lives. Grab a copy of his book, “The Ledge,” because it’s a great read. If you missed this event you better mark down the opening session for the conference later this year—it’s bound to be special.

Another first at the conference was the “Best of the Best” people’s choice water tasting contest. This event engaged all the attendees who enjoyed some of the best water from across the state. Bay County Utility won out and will hold the bragging rights for the year. Congratulations!

Water For People fundraisers were in full force thanks to Barika Poole and Christine Ellenberger. The exhibitors raffle was a big hit, and of course the fan-favorite “Duck Race” had everyone at the edge of the pool. Once again, Greg Taylor was master of ceremonies, while head duck wrangler Tyler Tedcastle made sure the ducks went down the lazy river—and most importantly—came back. This event provided the perfect opportunity for everyone to network and have some fun, and ultimately, provide clean, safe water to areas of the world in need.

The exhibit hall was maxed out this year with over 180 exhibitors. A “premier sponsorship” bundle was newly introduced and was a big success. The bundle included Conference Platinum, Golf Eagle, and Poker Royal Flush sponsorships. Thanks to American Cast Iron Pipe Company, Ferguson Waterworks, Sigma Corporation, Hydra Service Inc., The Ford Meter Box Co. Inc., and Wagner Company of Florida Inc. for being the first to take advantage of this bundle. There always seems to be a flurry of activity around the exhibit hall and this year was no different. Attendees took full advantage of the opportunity to see new products, technologies, and systems firsthand.

The highlight of the awards luncheon had to be the Fuller Award presentation to Richard Anderson. Richard continues to provide outstanding leadership and service to the section. Congratulations to him and all the award winners. It was great to see a full house on hand to recognize all the achievements and cap off another great year!

The sixth annual 2030 Water Summit was a big hit. Those remote control voting devices were a nice added touch. Two great keynote speakers and policy makers were there to discuss Amendment 1, the Florida Water and Land Conservation Amendment, and its impact on the water industry. This summit specifically focused on the top five initiatives, their successes, and upcoming challenges. Thanks to Jackie Torbert for putting together a program that will assure our success as utilities and a water industry moving forward.

The workshops, technical sessions, and symposia gave all attendees the opportunity to stay current on relevant topics and new technologies. This is the heart and soul of what we do. I want to give a big thanks to Dr. Fred Bloetscher for championing a technical session second to none.

Competitions at the conference this year included the Backhoe Rodeo, Ductile Iron and Fun Tap Contests, and Meter Madness. These are fun and lively competitions among municipalities. It’s impressive to watch the skill these professionals put on display, coupled with the energy and excitement of competition; I love to watch and am in awe every year. A big thank you to Mike George and all the volunteers that made this happen. Great job!

Upcoming Events

We have several other events that are coming up this year, too. They include the Business Practices and Leadership Workshop, to be held at FSAWWA headquarters in St. Cloud; AWWA Fly-In in Washington, DC; FSAWWA Legislative Day in Tallahassee; Regional Meeting of Section Officers (RMSO) in Key Largo; and our twelve region taste tests.

We will also be presenting the FSAWWA distribution awards. When presenting these awards in the past, it’s been a humbling experience to see how important it is to the receiving utility. This award and its presentation gives utilities an elevated presence in front of their board, council, or commission. It is no surprise that the utilities make this a focal point every year. The award highlights the unseen work that goes on every day to maintain a safe and reliable drinking water system.

All of these events represent your membership benefits in action. They help with public relations for your local community, offer an opportunity for networking and education, offer professional development, and provide a voice for industry leaders to the nation’s lawmakers.

Please visit the FSAWWA website at www.fsawwa.org for more information and to see what upcoming events you might be interested in attending, or for which you might become an active volunteer. Remember, these are your benefits—put them to action and let them work for you.