FSAWWA Creates Operators and Maintenance Council

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Chair, FSAWWA

About five years ago FSAWWA created the Operators Council to meet the needs of the over 6,000 licensed drinking water treatment plant operators and distribution system operators across Florida.

As I was one of these licensed operators myself, the council was near and dear to my heart. I started my career with Hillsborough County as a water plant operator trainee all the way back in 1982. I worked hard to get my “A” level drinking water license and move my way up through the ranks. Membership in AWWA played a big part in that, helping my professional development and career advancement every step of the way. Now, 33 years later, and still working for Hillsborough County as its water operations manager, I feel a strong tie to plant operators and their development and opportunities for professional growth.

I remember sitting down with then-FSAWWA Chair Matt Alvarez and pouring out my passion as a plant operator and how to get this group of professionals more involved in the association. It was his idea to start a council. It took a few years to make this a reality, and in 2009-10, I became the founding chair of the Operators Council. Since that time, I have stayed closely involved, always keeping an eye on this group and helping out where I can. Operator membership in the association is now at 310 and climbing! That number is the direct result of the hard work of all the volunteers on the council and through the leadership of its chair, Steve Soltau. Way to go!

Our association believes in helping operators develop the skills necessary to reach their career goals and acquire in-depth knowledge in their chosen field. These skills will open doors to better prospects and greater opportunities.

I am particularly proud of the operator scholarship program offered through FSAWWA. The Operators Council annually makes available to drinking water treatment and distribution system plant operators, the following scholarships:

- Four scholarships of $500 per eligible student for upgrade of a drinking water or distribution system operator license.
- Two scholarships of $1,000 per eligible student pursuing a college degree relating to the drinking water industry.

These scholarships provide reimbursement of tuition, books, and fees through the applicable college/university financial aid department over a two-year period. Scholarships are awarded in both undergraduate and graduate categories.

Today, more than at any time in recent history, good education is an eligibility standard for employment in any sector of our industry. So don’t miss out—apply for one of the scholarships before the deadline of June 1 at www.fsawwa.org.

Now that the licensed operators have a network, voice, and seat at the FSAWWA table, we think it’s the perfect time to welcome in the maintenance personnel with the creation of the Operations and Maintenance Council, and I’m happy to relay that Steve Soltau will remain chair of the new group.

The mission of the council is as follows:

“Increase member services to water treatment plant operators, distribution system operators, and water treatment plant maintenance staff through increased opportunities for association leadership, participation, training, local networking, and expanded awards and recognition programs. We also will provide direction on long-term operator and maintenance needs and priorities to the board of governors.”

The role of maintenance personnel is to keep the machinery running: pumps, chemical feed systems, electrical equipment, and electronics for automation. As treatment plant operators, we know that maintenance staff is the backbone of any well-run facility. Having maintenance professionals working hand-in-hand with plant and distribution operators is essential to delivering clean, safe water to our customers. Without them, this simply could not happen.

Expanding council membership to water plant maintenance staff will provide them with the same specialized training and advancement opportunities as those shared by all members of AWWA.

The new council will work toward advancing the needs of water plant maintenance staff, while simultaneously fulfilling our obligations to licensed drinking water treatment and distribution system operators.

Some of the benefits that will now be available to water plant maintenance staff include but are not limited to:

- Representation on the FSAWWA board
- Representation within each region
- AWWA specialized mechanical, electronic, and electrical training
- Development of certification standards
- Active participation and recognition at local, regional, and state events and workshops
- Scholarship opportunities

On January 30 we had our first Operations and Maintenance Council meeting. Representatives from across the state joined in and discussed ideas, goals, and a framework to move this council forward and create value for the members and the utilities they work for. This is a grass-roots effort that is just getting off the ground.

We are excited and look forward to the “electrifying” growth and opportunities to be provided by this expanded council. If you are willing to help out and give back some of your knowledge to those up-and-coming in our industry, please contact Steve Soltau at 727-453-6980 and ssoltau@pinellascounty.org.