Serving the Water Community from the Bottom Up

Kim Kunihiro
Chair, FSAWWA

It is an honor to serve as chair of the Florida Section of AWWA in its 90th year. I have had the privilege to serve in several positions to help prepare me for the role I will serve this year. I am surrounded by so many past chairs who are still actively engaged in the work of the section, and a board of governors that has passion and excitement for our mission to serve the membership as they work in the water industry. I am thankful to Mark Lehigh, our 2014-15 chair, who has kept me involved over the past year, and I look forward to continuing to work with him and Grace Johns, our chair-elect.

We have just come from four outstanding days at the 2015 Fall Conference where Chad Pregracke, founder of Living Lands and Waters and a pioneer in cleanups of the Mississippi, Missouri, and Ohio rivers, enthusiastically reminded us all of our primary mission: to advocate for safe drinking water, public health, and the environment. We should also advocate for our staffs and our community of operators, engineers, scientists, customer service representatives, finance personnel, regulators, public health officials, service providers, and vendors, who all make our jobs possible.

The water industry is the silent industry, where we go about our daily business of water supply development, treatment, distribution, and environmental protection. Our customers expect and are confident that when they turn on the tap, clean, safe water will always be there. By advocating and reminding our customers and commissions of what we quietly and efficiently do every day, there may be a better understanding of the need to maintain and improve this valuable infrastructure before it fails or ages beyond repair.

One way to advocate is to be actively engaged in FSAWWA as professionals in the industry. The past chairs have included utility managers, service providers, consultants, and operators. You all have expertise and a unique amount of experience you can share with others, and we have a job for each and every member who wants to be involved.

My focus this year is to engage the membership and renew interest in some of the committees that may have downsized or lost members and focus during the recent recession.

We would like to grow opportunities for the customer service professionals to help us out in the Public Affairs Council. We would like to expand the SCADA and automation professionals’ involvement in the Technical and Education Council, where we are already well known for our quality educational programs. In the past year, a new Finance and Rates Committee has formed to focus on utility finance concepts, including rate setting.

The Utility Council could use your help in legislative and regulatory issues. This group works at a fast pace during the legislative session to influence the legislative process, including assisting in developing language for new legislation and communicating with house and senate members in support of the water industry. The FSAWWA has been working on this water bill for several sessions and those efforts have come to fruition: it’s likely that the current water bill will become law early in the session this year after the governor’s approval.

Hot issues at the national level this year are:

- Funding for infrastructure improvements through the Water Infrastructure Financing and Innovation Act (WIFIA), which has stalled in Congress.
- Inorganic contaminants, including lead and strontium.
- Implementation of the revised Total Coliform Rule, which must be implemented in Florida by April 1, 2016.

Direct and indirect potable reuse projects are being implemented in several states, including Florida, and FSAWWA is your resource for information and expertise on this emerging water supply option.

Last year, the FSAWWA board aligned our strategic planning efforts, mission, vision, and goals with the larger AWWA organization. Our mission is: “Uniting the water community to effectively manage WATER, the world’s most important resource.”

In 2016, we will be developing additional action plans to keep these goals moving forward and keep them relevant to the important issues in our state and our core principles. Our recently completed marketing and communications plan will be put into action with a variety of implementation steps.

The FSAWWA regional structure makes participation easy. Monthly, there are technical training sessions, social events, scholarship fundraisers, environmental cleanups, and many other opportunities to engage with others in the industry in your home territory. If you are open to international travel, the Water For People organization is for you. There are opportunities to travel to several countries to work on water supply development or sanitation projects, and there are FSAWWA regional and council fundraisers for this worthy effort throughout the year.

If any of these opportunities sound enticing, contact me or our friendly staff led by Peggy Guingona, our exceptional executive director, and we will match you to the committee, council, or regional leader who can get you involved. Our website is www.fsawwa.org.

My mission for the year is to advocate for the water industry and for our members in our mission for public health: delivery of safe and reliable drinking water at a reasonable price, and preservation of the environment, in all that we do. I invite you to participate and I look forward to hearing from you and working with you this year. Thanks for the opportunity!