Mentoring Program Increases Section Participation and Sparks Creativity

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How many of you reading this are members of AWWA and not actively participating in the organization? I’d suspect quite a few. Don’t worry; I’m not going to put a guilt trip on you. Quite the contrary— I’m going to offer a solution.

Has anyone asked you to become more active? Has an opportunity for you to do something really good with other Florida Section members come to your attention that you just would not want to miss, but you missed it anyway? I suspect unless you have commitments that are more pressing in your life, the answer would be “No.”

Membership in the association is the best way to learn more about all facets of the water industry, network with your peers, and establish lifelong friendships with some great people. It’s not happening for everyone in the association, and you may be one of them.

The new AWWA mentoring program has the potential for changing that for many new members. The program matches new members with existing members, and to date, there are 20 pairings in the section. That means that 20 new members have someone special in our association to talk with, introduce them to other members, and assist them in matching their interests to section efforts on committees and/or councils.

For those of you who would like to participate, the link to the application form is on the www.fswawa.org home page. Casey Cumiskey, the FSAWWA training coordinator/membership specialist, is our staff mentoring program contact and expert extraordinaire! She can be reached at fswawa.casey@gmail.com or (407) 957-8447.

The section has over 100 committees with many different topics including research, backflow protection, legislative, regulatory policy, Water For People, water tower competition, membership, mentoring, customer service, treatment plant and operators awards (where I started!), fall conference, Likins scholarship, information technology, and finance, to name a few.

Each section committee has a chair, and preferably, but not always, a vice-chair. The position of vice-chair is an excellent opportunity to hone leadership skills while working under the tutelage of the chair.

You might be thinking, “I’m new at work, I just got married, I’m active in my church, and/or my first child just arrived— how much time is any of this AWWA stuff going to take anyway?” These are all important considerations when deciding whether or not to become more active.

My section activities were done primarily at work. My supervisor, Bill Stephenson, was an active AWWA member. He was the previous Treatment Plant and Operators Awards Committee chair and later became the section chair. Not all supervisors are that active in AWWA, but if they have experience in the water industry, they should know the critical role AWWA plays in making drinking water in America the most excellent in the world.

Ask your supervisor if you could set aside some time for FSAWWA activities.

When I attended an AWWA annual conference (ACE), my wife, Janis, and daughters accompanied me. My oldest daughter, Jessica, had her first flight to the Dallas ACE when she was 8 months old. She and her sister, Joye, have wonderful memories of exploring the exhibition halls over the years. Sightseeing in our nation’s capital was one of many activities my family experienced, which we’ve also done in the other major cities that have hosted this convention.

Your active participation in the section can increase your knowledge of the industry and grow connections to experienced peers that will benefit your employer in countless ways. Personally, you will cherish the lifelong friendships developed through the association. I know—I have them!

You may have heard this phrase and be recognizing it in your career: The more you know, the more you know you don’t know. A twist on that phrase is that the more you know, the more you know you could know. In other words, the more you realize what’s being done, the more you realize what could be done. That’s the phrase I’d like to see us cultivate.

The section is involved with many water-related projects and issues. A less active member might just need to find out the one that interests him or her and get connected. But what if there’s something that interests someone that isn’t being addressed right now? Is there a method in place to find it and make it happen? Not yet, exactly, but I’d like to introduce you to a new initiative.

I’d like to see us solicit ideas of all kinds to improve any and all aspects of the water industry. Whether or not the originator is willing and/or able to work on the idea doesn’t matter. Either way, it should be placed in a depository for future consideration and possible action. I’d love to see a treasure trove of ideas that anyone in our section can contribute to and look through to find something that fits their skills and interests that they can then adopt and work on. In order to make this happen we might need another committee—a New Water Idea Discovery, Development, Assignment, and Implementation Committee!

You may be a dreamer and can imagine new ideas that would be excellent for us to explore. You may be a doer who just needs an idea to spark your creativity. You may take the lead or you might work under a great leader who can show you how it’s done.

Take the initiative today—right now—to start taking full advantage of your membership in AWWA. Connect. Contribute. Enjoy the lifelong journey.

I also hope to see you at the section’s fall conference, being held November 30 through December 4, where lots of new ideas will be generated and discussed. The Young Professionals Committee is having a joint luncheon with the mentoring program mentors and mentees on Tuesday at the event. Don’t miss it!