The most important component of FSAWWA's goal to advance knowledge creation and exchange is to recruit and prepare our future workforce of water professionals. According to AWWA's 2016 State of the Water Industry report, it seems to be difficult for the water industry to recruit, train, and retain skilled employees. Utilities will be further challenged as a large number of water industry employees are nearing or are currently eligible for retirement. A significant amount of institutional knowledge could be lost without proper succession planning and process documentation.

The results of the report's survey of AWWA members found that 44 percent of the 1,468 respondents have a negative perception of the water industry's preparation for talent attraction and retention. This is, however, an improvement over the 54 percent who responded that way in 2015. Just 1 percent of respondents indicated that the water industry was fully prepared to cope with any expected retirements in the next five years, while 12 percent thought the industry is not at all prepared and 32 percent thought it was only slightly prepared.

It's recognized by AWWA that investing in students and young professionals is critical for the future of the water profession. We can no longer just talk about what we are going to do—we need to do it.

**Contests**

We began this journey over 25 years ago when we first sponsored the annual statewide “Drop Savers” Water Conservation Poster Contest during National Drinking Water Week. The contest promotes water awareness and the importance of water conservation by providing students in kindergarten through high school the opportunity to design a poster about water conservation. First-, second-, and third-place winners in each of five grade-based divisions receive recognition and prizes. In 2016, 26 water utilities throughout Florida participated and over 100 posters were submitted for the statewide competition.

Our other big student activity is the annual Model Water Tower Competition (MWTC), which introduces middle and high school students to the world of engineering and the water profession by requiring them to design and build a water tower with specific size and height requirements. The FSAWWA's Region X (West Central Florida) was the first to inaugurate this contest back in 2004 under the leadership of Tod Phinney and the Region X Youth Education Committee.

In 2016, eight of our 12 regions held MWTC events that were attended by over 850 students. Middle school and high school teachers at the participating schools within the region present the MWTC to their classrooms, distribute the student packets, and collect and return the student registration forms to the FSAWWA region. The region administers a fun-filled day where students from all participating schools in that region enter their water towers to be judged in four categories: cost efficiency, hydraulic efficiency, structural efficiency, and design ingenuity.

In 2010, FSAWWA received the AWWA Section Education Award in recognition of our MWTC. This award recognizes section initiatives that educate water industry personnel, the public, students, or other groups about drinking water, and disseminates guidelines to enable other AWWA sections to conduct comparable educational activities.

**Funding and Support**

Since 2013, FSAWWA has provided funding and utility support as a proud partner of Heritage High School’s Academy of Environ-
mental Water Technology in Palm Bay. Among the water resource technology and environmental science courses offered, certification classes in drinking water and wastewater operations are available, with the opportunity to graduate with both certifications.

Since 2010, the Academy has enrolled 139 students, and 111 of them have graduated. Of these, 68 high school seniors have taken the Florida Department of Environmental Protection (FDEP) Class C drinking water treatment plant operator exam, and 25 of them passed the exam. Five now hold positions in the drinking water industry as drinking water treatment plant operator trainees: four at the City of Melbourne and one at the City of Palm Bay.

The section recently approved a three-year funding and collaboration partnership with the St. Johns Technical High School’s Academy of Coastal and Water Resources in St. Augustine. The academy was first established during the 2012-13 school year and promotes the graduation of students who are knowledgeable, skilled, and proficient in water and wastewater treatment and distribution. Students are required to master rigorous and relevant performance standards, experience multiple hands-on field experiences, conduct real-time research, and complete internships. Students are currently leaving the academy prepared to take the FDEP operator certification program Level C license exam. The academy began with 20 students, and currently, 26 students are enrolled.

The Operators and Maintenance Council provides up to four scholarships of $500 per eligible student each year to upgrade the student’s drinking water or distribution system operator license. Up to two scholarships of $1,000 per eligible student pursuing a college degree relating to the drinking water industry are also available each year. In 2016, the council awarded $2,000 in scholarships.

I hope you now have a better idea of what FSAWWA is doing to recruit and prepare our future workforce. The section is very proud of these programs and continues to seek and evaluate new ways to expand its influence in recruiting and training future water professionals. We need to do much more to reach out to our youth and those wishing to switch careers and give them the knowledge and resources they need to step into water utility careers as quickly as possible. This effort requires FSAWWA volunteers to evaluate, design, and implement effective programs and partnerships.

If you want to help, please contact FSAWWA staff, or reach out to our Public Affairs Council chair, Scott Richards; our Operators and Maintenance Council chair, Andrew Greenbaum, or the council’s past chair and current trustee, Steve Soltau; or your region chair. All contact information is available at www.fsawwa.org.

Many ideas are currently being proposed and discussed, and many opportunities exist to facilitate careers in the water industry that will help to make a better world through better water.

Scholarships

The FSAWWA has a long history of providing scholarships to promote the training and education of Florida water professionals. Each year, the Roy Likins Scholarship Committee awards scholarships to Florida undergraduate and graduate students. The minimum scholarship amount is $2,500 per student and provides reimbursement for tuition, books, and fees through the college or university during a two-year period. In 2016, the committee awarded $32,500 to eight Florida students.