See what I did there? Pumped... water... I guess you had to be there! But before we start looking ahead to 2019, let’s reflect a bit on 2018.

The Florida Section’s Fall Conference was held at Championsgate in Orlando, and what a great conference it was. I’d like to thank Kim Kowalski, now the incoming chair-elect, and the entire Manufacturers/Associates Council, as well as Peggy Guingona, the section’s executive director, and her staff, for a job well done. As usual, you guys knocked it out of the park with an event that was bigger and better than ever. Also, a great big “thank you” to our sponsors and exhibitors—there would be no conference without you all.

Hopefully, you made some time to attend the opening general session, with Bill Young, then the section chair, and Ray Baral Jr., the visiting AWWA vice president, opening with great speeches prior to the keynote speaker, Tim Gard. Tim took the serious topic of handling stress in our daily lives and made it hilarious. I have no idea how we’re going to be able to follow his talk in 2019, but I think it might have to include nose whistles and tiny rubber chickens! (Again, you had to be there.)

Another must-attend event at the conference was the now-famous BBQ Challenge. Thirteen teams cooked some of the best dishes I’ve ever tried, many of them starting their preparations on Sunday and smoking throughout the night. Congratulations to Peace River Manasota Regional Water Supply Authority for coming in as the top-ranked overall. The fact that Richard Anderson, past chair and the FSAWWA Finance Committee chair, was the event emcee was merely a coincidence (no, really!).

In charge of the BBQ were Richard Anderson and Mike Alexakis, as cochairs, and Mike George and John Fernald were committee members. Also, a shout-out goes to the event’s bar and food sponsors from the Contractors Council (see pages 38-40). Fundraising was handled by Mike Alexakis, incoming Contractors Council chair. Thank you!

The fund-raising events for Water For People were very successful, thanks to Juan Aceituno, the organization’s chair, and his team. Through a combination of direct donations, the Jimmy Vaughan guitar raffle, and the duck race, they were able to generate over $6,700 for the charity. A special thanks to Tyler Tedcastle, Member Engagement and Development Council chair, for wrangling those stubborn little duckies through the lazy river on a very cold afternoon! With rolled pants and sleeves, he followed the duckies around the river to make sure they made it safely back. And the race wouldn’t be the same without the voice of Greg Taylor, section trustee.

The competitions held at the conference were engaging and lots of fun, as were the poker and golf tournaments, which were very well-attended. Thanks to all who participated in those events.

Of course, the workshops and technical sessions were excellent and also well-attended. Many thanks to Fred Bloetscher, section vice chair, and Pamela London-Exner, Technical and Education Council chair, for their work in assembling and coordinating these sessions!

The annual business lunch and awards ceremony was held on Wednesday at the conference, with recognition awarded to several deserving individuals and agencies, including:

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Landmarks Award to the Dania Beach Water Treatment Plant (built in 1952)
Allen B. Roberts Award to Lisa Wilson-Davis
Executive Committee’s Dr. Edward Singley Award to Bob Claudy
Robert L. Claudy Award to Kim Kowalski
George W. Fuller Award to Mark Lehigh

Thanks to Jason Parillo for his “roast” about Mark for the Fuller Award—my goodness, what an interesting life Mr. Lehigh has led! Special thanks go out to Ray Baral Jr. and Susan Franceschi, AWWA member engagement and development group chief membership officer, for attending the lunch and for being there throughout the conference. We love the opportunity to host AWWA officers and staff, and to show off a little bit!

Also at the lunch I was honored and humbled to accept the chair’s gavel from Bill Young, the outgoing section chair. Boy, do I have big shoes to fill! I would like to thank Bill for his service to the section, not only during his tenure, but over many years. He was an excellent leader for us all, and has been a mentor for me for several years. I know that he will continue to serve FSAWWA well, as past chair and into the future.

Looking forward to 2019, we have lots of section and regional events, workshops, and seminars coming up, including the Tallahassee Fly-In on Jan. 22-24. Please visit the newly renovated FSAWWA website often, and keep an eye open for email notices of these and other events.

Thanks again for being a member of FSAWWA and please consider volunteering for the various events and activities in your region. I look forward to working with you all toward an outstanding 2019!

FSAWWA board members toast Mike as the new section chair.