Happy New Year and welcome to 2021, with the sincere hope that the year will allow us to put the fiasco that was 2020 behind us. Despite the difficulties last year, the Florida Section has been active, and we have accomplished a number of firsts.

**Virtual Fall Conference and Region Events**

Under the leadership of Kim Kowalski, our past chair, and the efforts of staff members Peggy, Donna, Casey, and Jenny, the section delivered its annual conference virtually, but with the added benefit that those in attendance listened to real-time presentations with the opportunities to ask questions. As a further benefit, we will be keeping the technical sessions active to all participants through January, so if you missed it, you can still listen in and get those professionals development hours (PDHs) and continuing education units (CEUs).

We had more than 60 people participate in the COVID-19 session that Rae Hafer set up. There were more than 60 in the potable reuse session as well, so it seems that attendance was good overall. Thank you all for supporting this section event. I’ll talk more about the conference next month.

Several regions held virtual events, a first for most of us, and they did so with some success. While nothing can replace the camaraderie of in-person events, virtual opportunities allow our members to stay in touch, see familiar faces, and keep up on industry news.

We will continue with our events and training in 2021, with the hope that we will see the awaited vaccine come to pass.

**A Vaccine on the Horizon**

Dr. Anthony Fauci says that Americans might start to see the vaccine delivered at the start of this year. The effort to deliver 350 million vaccines to the American public is a huge job. Three vaccines now show promise; two doses are needed, 21 days apart for at least one. The U.S. Army has been tasked with this effort as a part of Operation Warp Speed. General Gustavo Perna, a logistics expert, leads the distribution effort. He says he is “ready to go” once the order is given. His whiteboard has an extensive schedule, starting with “Day 0.” His goal is to prevent any single point of failure in the logistics of delivery of the vaccine, two of which must be kept at very cold conditions.

Obviously, the logistics dictate that first responders and medical personnel will have access first. Our Water Utility Council leadership should argue that our water and wastewater staffs should be a close second. We may need to lobby our elected officials to accomplish this goal, as teachers, the elderly, and many others will want—and deserve—to receive vaccines early in the process. Our employees work in the trenches every day (some literally!) to ensure reliable water and sewer services. There should be a concerted effort by the section and the utilities at the start of 2021 to get our folks vaccinated as soon as possible to protect them from the potential effects of COVID-19 in their workplaces.

This is especially important given that, on the wastewater side, several utilities have participated in COVID-19 tracing in wastewater, starting with Miami-Dade County. Florida Atlantic University (FAU) did six events on campus and noted that, as the semester wore on, COVID-19 cases climbed. Dormitories and athletics were the “hot spots” at FAU, something not unexpected. Other schools have tracked COVID-19 cases with students, staff, and faculty, which bear out the trend. The FAU is reaching out to some local communities that wish to track COVID-19 this winter. The information will be useful for hospitals, doctors, and health departments in predicting the potential needs of a community. We know that COVID-19 is out there and our people can be exposed to it.

Our mission is one that cannot fail. We are an essential industry, and our members are essential personnel. With winter upon us, flu, colds, and COVID-19 will mix.

I recall a line from the old “Hill Street Blues” television series: “Let’s be careful out there.” Let’s be safe as well, and hope that with the potential of a vaccine around the corner, the section and its activities, the interactions that bring us all together, will get back to whatever the “new normal” will be.

So, thank you for all you do to keep us safe! Good riddance to 2020—let’s get on with 2021!