As we prepare for our upcoming Fall Conference, which will be held November 27 to December 1 at the Renaissance Orlando at SeaWorld, we have a lot to celebrate! FSAWWA is 90 years old! I was wondering what was happening in 1926 when the Florida Section was born and here are some highlights: Marilyn Monroe was born, John Coltrane was born, the St. Louis Cardinals beat the Yankees in the World Series, and the founding fathers of FSAWWA got together and held their first independent conference on Nov. 18, 1926. The upstarts were from the St. Pete, Tampa, and Orlando areas. They expected 15 to 20 to attend and they had 60 show up—and so the first Fall Conference was born!

This year we will celebrate our 90th anniversary. We will be having a 90th anniversary gala at the conference on Tuesday evening, November 29, at the Hard Rock Hotel. Our featured entertainer is Grammy award-winner Jimmie Vaughan, one of the most respected blues guitarists in the world. A ticket is included in each full-conference registration package, and additional tickets for your family and guests are available at the onsite registration page for just $50 each (http://www.fsawwa.org/page/Conference-Homepage). Please join us as we celebrate 90 years of working in this great profession that values water and values public health!

We are also happy to celebrate our state Top Ops team that went to ACE16 in Chicago and brought home the GOLD!!!

Florida Section’s 2016 state Top Ops winner, the Palm Coast Water Buoys, went to ACE this year (the team has gone to the AWWA’s annual conference several times), competed, and again brought home the winner’s trophy. The team consisted of Fred Greiner, Tom Martens, and Peter Roussell, with Jim Hogan as their coach.

The team has a legacy of winning at the state and national levels. They have won 10 out of the last 12 years at the state competition and placed in every national-level competition they have entered since 2005, including six first-place wins, four second places and one third place.

Top Ops is the “College Bowl” of the water industry. Teams of one, two, or three water operators or lab personnel from all AWWA sections compete against each other in a fast-paced question-and-answer tournament. A moderator poses a broad range of technical questions and math problems, and the team scoring the most points in the championship round is awarded the Top Ops championship.

The state competition is run by the Operators Council, and in order to enter the competition, each team member must be an active operator member of AWWA, or work for a utility member or an organizational member of AWWA. Questions for the national competition are developed from AWWA publications. The committee compiling the questions is under the oversight of the Operator Involvement Committee of the AWWA Distribution and Plant Operations Division. Every year the questions are pulled from a bank of questions and sent to the Association of Boards of Certification (ABC), which validates the questions and creates rounds for the competition.

This year, 18 teams from the United States and Canada competed at ACE16, and the Water Buoys were victorious once again.

Competing in this type of competition not only reinforces camaraderie among the team members and pride in their work in the water industry, but the education they obtain in preparation for the competitions is passed on to their co-workers through in-house training sessions.

So, it is now time for all utilities to put together the team that will challenge the Water Buoys. The next state Top Ops competition will be held in spring 2017 at the Florida Water Resources Conference. To challenge the Buoys is going to take some preparation, so it is not too soon to start. The FSAWWA has the added bonus of being able to send the Buoys and one other team to ACE17 to compete. The ACE17 will be in Philadelphia next year!

In addition to Top Ops, please consider competing at the Florida Section AWWA’s Fall Conference in the Backhoe Rodeo, Tapping Contest, and Meter Madness. Winners of Meter Madness and the Tapping Contest go on to compete at the national level. Details for entry are available at the conference website at http://www.fsawwa.org/page/2016Operator.

Congratulations to the Palm Coast Water Buoys, and we look forward to seeing you all at the FSAWWA 90th anniversary celebration at the Fall Conference as we celebrate, explore, and appreciate the “value of water.”