Welcome to AWWA NJ’s March Spotlight Member, Laura Cummings, PE. Laura is the Executive Director of the Southeast Morris County MUA that services the greater Morristown area. Laura holds a Bachelor of Science in Civil Engineering from Texas A&M and a Master’s of Science from the University of Cincinnati. Laura has been a member since 1989 and has been active in a variety of capacities in the water industry, she currently serves as Vice Chair of the Water Utility Council.

Why did you decide to go into the field of water?

My first position as an entry level engineer was with James M. Montgomery Consulting Engineers in Pasadena, CA. After a few months, I was assigned on a temporary basis to the Applied Research Department (ARD). What I found in ARD was a group of people whose enthusiasm and motivation for everything “water” was contagious – so I never went back to my original position. The ARD was the brain child of Dr. Rhodes Trussell. Through my work with JMM, I was able to meet and work for or with some of the most dedicated water professionals – Dr. Marco Aieta, Dr. Andrew Eaton, Dr. Mike McGuire, Dr. Issam Najm, Joan Oppenheimer, Dr. Scott Summers, Carol Tate and the list goes on. ARD was a leading research team conducting many projects funded by AWWARF (now WaterRF). Many of these projects were used to provide input for the regulatory making process. Most of these works were presented and/or published at the local and national AWWA conferences and in the AWWA Journal.

How did you become a volunteer for AWWA? What motivates you to be active in the Section?

Participating in AWWA was more like a right of passage in my growing career at JMM – I joined my first committee and attended a national conference my very first year out of school. My involvement continued from there where I have served on AWWANJ’s Board, served as a member on the Research and Technology Transfer and Strategic Planning committees, served as Chair of Education and Professional Development and Infrastructure Management Committee and currently serve as Vice Chair of the Water Utility Council. I have also served as a volunteer on various AwwaRF/WaterRF projects, as a member of the NJDEP’s Drinking Water Quality Institute and on Stevens Institute of Technology ABET accreditation committee for the environmental engineering program. I have also taught the introductory and advanced operator licensing courses. Through the years I have also encouraged my staff to participate in AWWA committees as well as compete in the Top Ops competitions. What is motivating about remaining active is that your targeted areas of involvement can evolve as part of your career growth, where my interests now are primarily held at the state and Federal legislative levels which fit well with serving on the Water Utility Council and in my position as Executive Director.

Hobbies and outside interests?

My spouse Petra and I enjoy anything that has to do with travelling and mainly that which involves meeting local inhabitants and their way of living, enjoying nature through birding and being outdoors. Often times our ventures are to less travelled locations where you learn to appreciate the simplicities in life and where nature never ceases to be inspirational. Our trips have included the Antarctic; Cuba; Galapagos Islands, Ecuador; Yucatan Peninsula, Mexico; several countries in South Africa; Machu Picchu and Tambopata National Reserve, Peru and many other places. Our travel includes the US as well having travelled to all but a handful of the states. Our next trip planned includes rafting through the Yosemite on the Tuolumne River with hopes to follow with a venture to Israel and Jordan at some point near in the future.
What legacy would you like to leave behind?

From an AWWA perspective, I hope to leave behind that same right of passage that was handed to me and to have people continue to pay forward getting people involved in our water industry. I've tried to hand down what was handed to me and I hope that this continues. The relationships we make in our water world makes us stronger, both personally and professionally, but our water world is small and AWWA helps us vest these relationships to a familial level.