



## DID MY CAREER MAKE A DIFFERENCE?

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At some point or another in life I think each of us ask ourselves this question. Have the things I've done made a difference, have they helped the community, my family, my coworkers, and have they made things better for the future? Well, as I have said for the last 12 years at every training session...the answer is yes! For those of you who serve as Water & Wastewater Operations Specialists, you answer this question each and every day, without gratitude, glory, or recognition. Every person and community served owes each of you a sincere debt of gratitude for ensuring their health and safety 24 hours per day, 365 days per year.

However, this article is intended to hit a little closer to home. You see, I have been very fortunate my entire life to have positive role models, people I could look up to and strive to emulate. My parents were the best, and I couldn't be more grateful for all they have done on my behalf. My brother and sisters have always been there, as well as my closest friends. My wife has been a rock, and has always supported my career path. I also had a few teachers who went way above and beyond the call, and made learning fun. When I entered this field I was blessed to work for an amazing Superintendent who truly led by example, and a Chief Operator who encouraged me to understand our work rather than just memorize some prescribed course of action. All of the many people I worked with, or for when I was starting out, had a great impact on who I am today and I carry a "piece" of each of them with me every day.

I had a coach in high school who really made a huge difference. He coached both football and baseball, and while he never professed himself a role model, he did change my outlook on life forever. I'm proud to say he became a life-long friend, and taught me the most important lesson of all...your life and work did matter to someone! Since I'm a guy, and a little cold hearted, I don't share my feelings. Sound familiar? Well, this man, the coach and friend who had meant so much to me passed away unexpectedly, and I never took the opportunity to thank him for all he had meant to me through the years. Lesson learned, and it's not easy, but I do try to let people know they have made a difference.

That brings us to today. In the early 2000's I was kind of adrift, I wasn't sure if my career path was correct for me, so I took an interview with the New York Rural Water Association. This is when I met Pat Scalera, and first witnessed her passion and drive for both

our industry and this association. Now, before you all jump to the rainbow at the end of the story, please let me remind you that Pat hired someone else for the position! After the interview we agreed to stay in contact, and we did communicate from time to time over the next couple of years. Of course, Pat did eventually hire me, but it wasn't just that, she convinced me to take a chance on myself and start up a new program which had no history and no security. From there she convinced me to present at training sessions, something I never thought I could ever do in a million years. As Bob Moody will tell you, the first few were absolutely brutal, but with time they have become just "slightly painful" for those who attend. Whether it is training, or starting up a new program, Pat has a way of making all of us believe we can do things that we have always felt were beyond our capabilities.

There are certainly a lot of people who know Pat much better than I, and could fill volumes of articles with great stories, and proof of her achievements. But I have always tried to pay attention to how people treat each other. I have seen the person (Pat) who went out in the field on a -22 degree day to see a piece of equipment being demonstrated while searching for a leak that had haunted a community, the person who proudly hiked all over D.C. for hours and hours to ensure the regulations are just, and the funding remains to benefit our member systems. The person who sent staff to assist with various natural disaster recoveries, and worried about them as if they were family, the person who always remained polite and calm, even when everyone around her was losing their cool, the person who was never too busy to find time to talk to someone, and always with a smile rather than a sigh, and the person who took this association from very humble beginnings, to the industry standard the NYRWA represents today. I recall Pat telling me once the association is so strong because each and every one of our staff members is different. She explained that they each bring a different personality trait and professional expertise to the table, that when blended together makes this association exceptional. Very true, and something I try to remember on a daily basis.

Personally, I would never have reached my professional goals had it not been for Pat. She always provided the positive support, time, and training necessary to attain these goals. I tell people, thanks to Pat I have worked in Jamaica, Peru, Mexico, Holland, and Panama...without ever leaving New York State. ▶▶▶