

WHAT'S NEW AT NYRWA

By Jamie Herman

While 2020 & 2021 have been very difficult years, here at NYRWA we have been very busy. Our staff, the staff of YOUR association, have quietly been working diligently on numerous fronts in an effort to better serve our System and Associate Members. My hats off to each and every one of our staff for their time and effort in making this association better each and every day.

First, we are working on upgrading our membership database. This has been a lengthy process working with a contractor to develop a database that will provide for our current and future needs. Due to the exceptional efforts of our very own Cheryl Kearns, with assistance from Kim & Trish in our office, we hope the new database will roll out by mid-2022.

Our Water and Wastewater Apprenticeship program has really taken flight. A hearty NYRWA thank you to all who have participated in or supported this program. We have 35 apprentices statewide and will soon be graduating the first class. We have certainly learned along the way, and Covid-19 made some activities impossible, but with challenge comes ingenuity and strength. I am confident we are better prepared to meet the needs of future apprentices as a result. Our staff worked tirelessly on a grant application that would reimburse the systems who hired apprentices for a portion of the on-the-job training labor. Through their efforts, we were awarded \$241,000.00 for reimbursement. Every single dollar of that grant went to the systems, providing a measure of financial relief. We hope and anticipate that this grant may be available in the future. Regardless of the funding, we believe the apprenticeship program is a huge benefit to systems who are looking to hire new, untrained operations specialist for the future. Kevin Maine and Joe Redmond have really done an amazing job with this new concept and program, we appreciate their efforts.

In February 2021, NYRWA was awarded a contract with the NYS Department of Environmental Conservation to provide training, technical assistance, and wastewater facility optimization to wastewater systems in the Lake Champlain & Chesapeake Bay watersheds. We are pleased to partner with the NYSDEC on this contract and look forward to working with wastewater systems in these specific areas. The assistance includes facility optimization efforts for nutrient reduction, general technical assistance such as smoke testing, sampling, emergency response, and compliance just to name a few. This contract will also provide free training for operations specialist in the (2) watersheds. By November 2021, we anticipate having a Wastewater Technical Assistance Provider located in each watershed to provide this assistance and training.

In 2021, we also added new field staff as a state affiliate of the National Rural Water Association. As of the writing of this article, we are adding a Wastewater Technician to the central and western region of the state, a Water Training Specialist, and a Wastewater Training Specialist. All these efforts are taken to better serve our membership.

What will training in 2022 look like? I am often asked this question. We do not have a crystal ball, but we are planning for the best case, with a plan B, just in case. As we speak our staff is working on the 43rd Annual Technical Training Workshop & Exhibition to be held May 23 – 25, 2022 at the Turning Stone Resort in Verona, NY. Kim Bennett is leading the charge on the training agenda while Cheryl takes the lead on booth registrations, attendee registrations, sponsorships, etc... We could not do this without their time and effort! A special thank you to our conference sponsors, exhibitors, and speakers. We could not have an annual conference without each and every one of you, thank you for your dedicated and continued support of this association. There is definitely more to come on the conference, but please save the dates. We look forward to seeing you all again, it's been way too long!

As for recertification training, we anticipate being in the classroom, with a small addition of web-based courses in the winter months. There has been a change from our funding agencies. They want us to provide training that is free for attendees. We, as an association, will meet this challenge. Unfortunately, this will mean that lunches will not be provided at most of our sessions. We hope you understand and continue to attend. Again, a huge Thank You goes out to our Associate Members who make the time to share their expertise at no cost, allowing us to provide this training. We could not provide the training, especially free of charge, without their commitment and dedication to our association.

This summer I made the time to visit many Wastewater Treatment Facilities across the state. Thank you all for welcoming me and taking the time to talk about your issues and what you would like to see from NYRWA. One visit really stuck in my head. Doug (you know who you are) said they are required to complete an assessment of their manholes, but only have 2 operations specialists who are busy at the treatment plant and compost facility. I suggested they reach out to our Wastewater Technician who could assist with this project. Doug replied, "I couldn't ask you to do that". That's what we are here for. We know most if not all of you are short staffed on both the water and wastewater side. Please use our assistance, our staff are able and willing to assist, that's what we do, and that's why you are members. We are here to help you in any way possible to continue to provide... Quality on Tap!

Last, I wanted to thank our own Steve Grimm, who for a year covered the entire state with technical assistance and training for our wastewater members. Amazing and fantastic job Steve! Your efforts are appreciated. We hope our members have appreciated Steve's work with our new sewer camera system, and we thank those members who have taken advantage of the service. I would also like to welcome our newest staff members: Carrie Bolton, Water Training Specialist; Brandon Crompt, Wastewater Technician (central & western, NY); and I look forward to announcing 3 more new staff members in my next article.>>

NYRWA is a great association, there is no where I would rather be, without question. The association is strong because of our amazing System and Associate Members, as well as our professional and experienced Board & Staff of employees. No one knows what the future holds, but I am confident that together we can not only meet any challenges, but also succeed.

Thank you one and all. Here's wishing each of you and your families a very Merry Christmas and a happy and healthy New Year! 💧💧