

APWA Congress: Texas Style!

Attendees make an outstanding impact at September show

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Of course we've all heard the old saying that "Everything is bigger in Texas." We know that goes for big oil companies, big cattle ranches, a big economy (the most Fortune 500 companies based in any state) and, of course, the big ten-gallon cowboy hats.

But now we can add one more to that list: the 2007 APWA International Public Works Congress & Exposition. The conference took place September 9-12 in San Antonio at the Henry B. Gonzalez Convention Center, and it came through with some genuine Lone Star State numbers: 102,500 square feet of exhibit space and 501 exhibitors (our second-highest total in ten years); well over 2,300 full registrants (not a record but highest thus far this century); and a whopping 154 educational sessions. But while those numbers are impressive, APWA has never been about quantity. It's quality that we're after, and folks, did we get it. From the hilarious insights of well-known humorist Dave Barry, to the serious contributions of our great General Session speakers, we got to hear it from the best. Throw in the new Public Works Stormwater Summit, twelve stimulating workshops on Workshop Wednesday and a host of terrific networking events, and we clearly had the makings of a real Texas shindig.

What follows are highlights of the 2007 Best Show in Public Works, including everything from the special award presentations, to some two-stepping at Wednesday's Banquet, to the tale of an exploding whale.

It all begins on...Saturday

Some APWA members may think that the conference doesn't really fire up until Sunday, but there are always some great activities to choose from on Congress Saturday as well. For example, the Self-Assessment Workshop, led by Ann Daniels, APWA Director of Technical Services, had an excellent turnout with 54 registrants sharing thoughts on how to evaluate and improve their agencies' management policies and procedures. APWA has conducted this Self-Assessment Workshop now for more than ten years at our annual show, and the event continues to be both valuable and well-attended.

And of course the Saturday afternoon tournament at the Republic Golf Club was a great way to start the week for all those golfers making the trip early for that extra day on the links. At the Get Acquainted Party on Sunday evening, I caught up with tournament participant Jim Owens, Sales

Manager for Falls Snow Plows in Little Falls, Minn. Jim was an exhibitor at the show, and is a former member of the Congress Site Selection Committee. His take on the tourney? "Ninety-five degrees and seventy-five dew point!" he laughed. "Seriously, it was warm but we had a good time. The local chapter did an excellent job. It was a challenging course and there was plenty of food and prizes."

Those who came early to San Antonio with a charitable frame of mind had an exciting project waiting for them—assisting the city's Neighborhood Action Department in a special community-wide APWA Legacy Project. The project's main focus was to aid elderly and disadvantaged people living in San Antonio. "When the Legacy Committee began planning this event, we were told to expect 10-12 people to participate," said Kristina Ramirez, Project Manager with Bury+Partners, Inc., Temple, Tex., and Chair of the Legacy Committee. "In the end a total of 43 people donated their time and abilities to this worthy cause. Participants included not only Texas Chapter members, but members from as far away as North Carolina and British Columbia." These outstanding volunteers and staff worked side-by-side to brighten up the entry fencing for residents of the Sunshine Plaza.



A total of 43 people donated their time and abilities to the APWA Legacy Project.

Of course, there was plenty of APWA business to take care of on Saturday as well, including the annual House of Delegates (HOD) Business Meeting in the morning, and the mid-

afternoon HOD Regional Breakout sessions. At the morning meeting APWA President-Elect Larry Frevert (who would become APWA President the following day) discussed the seven priorities of his presidential year, and asked the delegates to embrace and help with each (his priorities are listed in his article beginning on page 11 in this issue). “I certainly look forward to being with you throughout the year, meeting with you and the chapters,” Frevert said. “I’m looking forward to making forty-three trips and talking about what a great Association APWA is. Thank you for being here this week, thank you for what you do for APWA, and thank you for what you do for public works.”

Along with the roundtable discussions of the HOD, the nine Technical Committees met on Saturday afternoon to develop business plans, review policy and position statements, and discuss the issues affecting APWA’s membership today (the committee chairs had given presentations to the HOD earlier that morning). For summaries of these meetings, go to www.apwa.net and click on “Technical Committees.”

Bright and emerging prospects

Congress Sunday got off to a great start with the eleventh annual First-Timers Meeting. This popular event was coordinated by the APWA Diversity Committee, and once again the breakfast was sponsored by Rinker Materials of Houston, Tex. Augie Chang, Diversity Committee Chair and Senior Project Manager with Psomas, San Diego, Calif., facilitated the meeting and gave welcoming remarks to 340 new Congressgoers (a new record for our show). Throughout the meeting, members of the Diversity Committee and the Board of Directors provided helpful hints to the First-Timers on how to get the most value from their first Congress. To help break the ice, David and Janet Grouchy (pronounced Groo-shay, so no jokes) of Grouchy Enterprises, Covington, La., were on hand, conducting a fun networking exercise that helped the newcomers get to know one another better.



A record 340 attendees gathered in Room 217CD of the Henry B. Gonzalez Convention Center for the 11th annual First-Timers Meeting.

As a number of APWA Presidents have done before him, soon-to-be President Frevert provided inspirational words of wisdom to the new attendees. “Make a difference this week at Congress,” Frevert told them. “If you have questions,

don’t be bashful. We want to hear from you. When you go back to your workplace, share with your colleagues what you have learned this week. Your community, your agency, your company has an investment in you. They see you as a bright and emerging prospect for what they do and they expect you to bring something back for your colleagues, so that you can help pass on what you have learned this week.

“APWA is a wonderful organization,” he continued. “You will make friends this week that you will keep throughout your professional career. I envy you this week because I’m getting near the end of my career, and I’m getting to the point where I probably won’t make as many friends as I have in the past. So will you come up to me and introduce yourselves so I can make a new friend?” While the audience members laughed with Frevert at this appeal, it was obvious that they took his sentiments to heart, and many of the attendees could be seen shaking his hand after the meeting.

From nervous to relaxed

“Have you seen Ron Norris or Win Westfall?” “Wow, this place is huge.” “Gee, there really is a difference between a Leader and a Manager.” “Surviving Local Government—who knew I’d learn so much?” Twelve enthusiastic Emerging Public Works Leaders and their respective Mentors shared a great time during the week of Congress. “From the Emerging Leaders Dutch Treat Dinner on Saturday night right through to the close of the Annual Banquet, they were networking, sharing their career thoughts and concerns, learning how APWA works and who our leaders are, and making lifetime friendships,” said Ann Daniels, coordinator of the Emerging Leaders program. “By participating in the Scavenger Hunt they explored the exhibit floor and met exhibitors, staff, international guests, and current and past APWA leaders while collecting APWA premiums as souvenirs.”

According to Daniels, the highlight of the week for the Mentors was watching the transformation of their young leaders from nervous first-timers on Saturday and Sunday to relaxed public works peers by week’s end. “Both groups were committed to fulfilling their obligations, right down to the seven a.m. breakfast sessions on Tuesday and Wednesday,” she said. “Ask anyone who participated whether it was worth their time and effort. The overwhelming response will be, ‘You bet.’”

You can’t spell it without “duh”

Dressed in yellow and wearing a big, yellow ten-gallon cowboy hat, the “Yellow Rose of Texas” greeted the audience at the Opening General Session and kept everyone entertained during General Sessions throughout the week. To call Rose animated simply doesn’t do her justice. If anyone lacked energy as they walked through the door, they didn’t have that problem after seeing Rose. And her loud “Howdy!!” ringing out each morning over the loudspeaker system was enough to get us all going with a smile.



The "Yellow Rose of Texas" kept the attendees amused at all of the General Sessions during Congress week.

Following Rose's greeting, President Bill Verkest took the stage for his final presidential address to the attendees. Verkest mentioned a number of APWA successes from the past year, including significant advances in Chapter Capacity Building, the first-ever Education Summit, and the implementation of the Education and Certification Blueprint Task Force. "As I leave office today, my passion for APWA and the public works profession is more focused and grounded than it has ever been," he said in the conclusion to his speech. "I am so very proud of what each of you do for your communities in delivering first-level public works services, in sustaining infrastructure performance, and in meeting the very difficult challenges that you face every day. I am proud of what you do for your branches and your chapters. I am proud of what you do for APWA. And I am proud of what you do for the public works profession."

Following welcoming remarks from Tom Wendorf, Director of Public Works for the City of San Antonio, Inas Aweidah, Texas Chapter President, and San Antonio Councilwoman Diane Cibrian, new APWA President Larry Frevert accepted the presidential gavel from President Verkest. "On behalf of the membership, Board of Directors, and staff, I'd like to thank you for your dedication, passion and leadership during your presidency," Frevert said to Verkest.

As he did at the House of Delegates Meeting the day before, Frevert mentioned the seven priorities that he and the Board of Directors will focus on during his presidential year. "I am formally, officially and respectfully asking for your help as we pursue these priorities," he said. "It's going to take us all. Some of you may well say, 'I am too busy to help with these.' Some of you may well say, 'This isn't my responsibility.' Some of you may well say, 'Why now? Why me? Why us?' I know you are busy. Ours is a very demanding profession, trying to satisfy the public on a regular basis. But the needs we face in public works are great, and it takes great people. People like you that are here in this room. Please ask yourself, 'If not me, who? If not now, when?'" (For the full text of President Frevert's speech, please see the "President's Message" on page 4 in this issue.)

Following Frevert's speech, it was time for one of the most anticipated events of the 2007 Congress: Columnist, humorist, and all-around entertaining guy Dave Barry took the



Immediate Past President Bill Verkest (left) stands with new President Larry Frevert following the traditional passing of the presidential gavel during the Opening General Session.

podium as the Opening General Session keynote speaker. Though Barry has finally retired from writing his internationally-syndicated column, most of our readers will well remember his writing style—a blend of pointed commentary and zany satire. Barry demonstrated Sunday morning that his wit translates just fine from the page to the stage, and his work as stand-up comic kept the audience in stitches for the better part of an hour.

Barry began by taking some good-natured jabs at his own home state. "Florida: You can't spell it without 'duh'," he said, referring to the non-stop election snafus of recent years. And on the state's well-known history of hurricane troubles, he added, "South Florida really is a terrific area and I do hope you get a chance to come visit sometime. My one piece of advice is that you don't want to come during hurricane season, which runs from June through the following... June."

Of course, no Dave Barry monologue would be complete without a few stories from his most popular columns, including the day he embarrassed his teenage son by picking him up from school in the Oscar Mayer Wienermobile, or the true urban legend



Humorist and author Dave Barry proved to be a great stand-up comic at the Opening General Session.

of how the Oregon State Highway Division tried to remove a rotting whale carcass from a beach through a not-quite-judicious application of dynamite. But perhaps the funniest bits were the constant one-liners he threw out during his presentation. Here are a few of the best:

- “What I do for a living, my actual job, is I’m a humor writer. Which means I sit around, in my underwear, and make things up. It’s a lot like being a consultant.”
- “We have a new attitude in Miami, in fact we have a new slogan: ‘Come back to Miami: We weren’t shooting at you.’”
- “I’m running for President [of the U.S.] and I owe it to you to tell you what I think, where I stand on the issues. And I speak from the heart and if it offends you I’m sorry, but here’s where I stand: I agree with you.”
- “I also have some views on health care. I think we should have a constitutional amendment that says if you have an appointment to see a doctor, and you have to wait for more than thirty minutes, you get to give the doctor a shot.”

The Exposition opens...

But Dave Barry had company in the “eagerly anticipated” department: the annual opening of the Exposition at the usual 12 p.m. sharp, this year performed to the music of the all-female mariachi band Las Altenas.



The exhibit hall had good attendance all three days of the conference.

The show floor was impressive and expansive—Texas-sized, indeed. Walking up and down the aisles gave attendees the chance to chat with exhibitors about such diverse products as the H200 plow wing from Viking-Cives Group; the 2001SL water-filled barricade from Yodock Wall Co.; the Wedge Camera night-vision camera which eliminates blind spots on any vehicle, from Pro-Vision Video Systems; or... well, the list goes on and on. Which is a good thing, as the attendees were clearly excited to have plenty of equipment, supplies and services to evaluate and explore.



Attendees listen intently to the speaker at one of the show’s 154 educational sessions.

The finest in public works

The 150-plus educational sessions at this year’s Congress provided plenty of proof that APWA provides the finest educational program in the public works community. Topics ranged from water infrastructure security and emergency operations, to the benefits of public/private partnerships, to the history and practice of sewer root control. Although there remained an emphasis on technical sessions, there were also numerous personal and professional development sessions such as “Building Depth into Your Leadership Team,” “Mentoring for the Future” and “Getting the Respect You Want and Deserve.”

If you couldn’t make it to this year’s Congress, you can easily hear what you missed. Just go to www.prolibraries.com to check out the educational sessions available on CD-ROM or on audio CD only.

A humanitarian effort

Saturday’s Legacy Project wasn’t the only humanitarian project APWA sponsored during Congress week. In a partnership with the South Texas Blood & Tissue Center, APWA conducted the Proud to Care Blood Drive on Congress Monday and Tuesday. The large number of participants on both days gave further proof that public works professionals give back to their communities in so many ways.

“Thank you to all APWA members, exhibitors and guests who rolled up their sleeves and participated in the first APWA Proud to Care Blood Drive in San Antonio,” says Brian Van Norman, APWA Director of Chapter Relations. “As a result of your generosity, 71 pints of blood were collected during the September 10-11 event. In partnering with the South Texas Blood & Tissue Center, all donations will benefit patients from a 43-county area across South Texas. Every day the South Texas Blood & Tissue Center supplies 500 units of blood to hospitals in the region. Thank you for taking the time to make a lasting impact on the lives of residents in San Antonio and the surrounding area.”



Attendees give blood at the Proud to Care Blood Drive in the main lobby of the convention center.

Watch for the APWA Proud to Care Blood Drive in New Orleans in 2008.

“You’re about good works”

On Monday, a packed house was on hand to hear “The Adventure of Change: Timeless Certainties for Uncertain Times,” our keynote program presented by author, explorer and cultural anthropologist Jeff Salz, Ph.D. Among other notable exploits, Salz has scaled the Patagonian peaks of Argentina, spent days buried inside snowdrifts in the Himalayas, and sailed Lake Titicaca, the world’s highest navigable body of water, in a homemade reed boat. Salz’s presentation to the Congress attendees dealt with change and how to be inspired rather than intimidated by it.

“I am not a motivational speaker,” Salz said early in his presentation. “I’m a father, and I’m a friend, and I’m a being on this planet who through the work I do hopefully can make a difference. And that’s my message to you today—that you are involved with really important work. Sometimes underappreciated. Sometimes you only hear when things go wrong. But I want to tell you this: It’s not about the outcome. It’s about what you do every single day and knowing that it works. Kahlil Gibran, the great Lebanese poet, wrote a book called *The Prophet*. He said in that book, ‘Our work is our love made visible.’ You’re about good works, you’re about public works, you’re about making your living, making your loving, visible.”



“The only thing that will not work tomorrow is the thing that worked yesterday,” said Monday’s General Session speaker Jeff Salz to the audience.

Speaking about the importance of embracing change, Salz announced, “You cannot do the thing in public works, in your city, in your life, in your family that you did one

year, five years, ten years ago with the same equipment, the same technology, the same management practices, the same mindset, and have the same success that you had one, five, ten years ago. Why? The world has changed. My case is this: The only thing that will not work tomorrow is the thing that worked yesterday.”

PWHS Luncheon focuses on Highland Lakes

Congress Monday’s Public Works Historical Society Luncheon was another highlight of the show, with a great presentation delving into the history behind the construction of the Highland Lakes dams and the expansive impact that program has had on the Central Texas Hill Country region.



John Williams with the Lower Colorado River Authority spoke at the PWHS Luncheon about the Highland Lakes dams.

“John Williams with the Lower Colorado River Authority (LCRA), headquartered in Austin, Texas, discussed the creation of LCRA by the State of Texas in the 1930s to finish a half-built dam on the Colorado River,” said Teresa Hon, APWA Technical Services Program Director. Eventually LCRA built a chain of six dams and lakes, known as the Highland Lakes, that transformed the region by providing hydroelectric power, a reliable water supply, protection from floods, and recreational opportunities. “The presentation included several historical photos showing construction of the dams and early-day electrical operations and recreational marketing,” Hon said.

CPWA Luncheon: Infrastructure Policy

Also on Monday, more than 140 Canadian public works officials gathered with CPWA and APWA leaders for the annual CPWA Luncheon. Carol Beal, Assistant Deputy Minister of the Program Operations of Infrastructure Canada, presented the federal government’s plan for rehabilitation of infrastructure over the next seven years.



A packed house was on hand to hear Canadian Public Works Association President Ian Vaughan speak at Monday’s CPWA Luncheon.

“Cities and communities are central to Canada’s national objectives related to economic growth, the environment and quality of life,” said Beal. “It is for these reasons that the

Government of Canada has adopted a new long-term plan for infrastructure, the 'Building Canada' plan."

CPWA members in both the public and private sectors were involved in a consultation process to develop "Building Canada." According to CPWA President Ian Vaughan, "All Canadians benefit when professional associations like CPWA enter into partnerships and professional relationships with federal government policymakers such as Carol Beal at Infrastructure Canada. CPWA will continue to foster vibrant, positive working relationships with the government of Canada."

For more information about CPWA activities visit www.cpwa.net.

The goal is to make an impact

You may have noticed that most standing ovations start with a few folks in the front rows, followed gradually by the middle sections, and then, almost reluctantly, the attendees at the rear. Only rarely is an audience so moved that they stand instantly as one. And typically, you're more likely to see this happen at a rock concert or play than at a public works meeting. Nonetheless, that's exactly what happened at the conclusion of Tuesday's General Session presentation by Rick Rigsby, Ph.D., called "Making an Impact!" Rigsby is billed as one of "the most dynamic speakers in America" and from our audience's reaction, that billing is accurate—he delivered a powerful presentation that left audience members inspired, overwhelmed, and in many cases, in tears.

Rigsby, a former professor at Texas A&M University and currently President of Rick Rigsby Communications and Impact World Group, delivered the message that merely creating an impression does not measure up to making an impact. "If you call yourself a leader, it's high time we start acting like leaders," he began. "Not just offering a nice, rhetorical medley of words that say that we're a leader; but it's time, in this culture, to be the greatest leader that you can be. In essence, to be the kind of engineer, to be the kind of consultant, to be the kind of vendor, to be the kind of administrator, to be the kind of worker who makes an impact. We need people who are committed to improving, committed to growing, committed to leaving a legacy. We need folks who will ask, every single day, 'What can I do to make excellence dominant, prominent, preeminent, number-one, top-drawer in my life?' The goal is to make an impact!"

Throughout his presentation Rigsby stressed the importance of being a positive role model, both at work and in life itself. "What are you modeling?" he asked the audience. "Are you just showing up every day, going through the motions, hoping that someone will be impressed by your tenure? The goal is to make an impact. The goal is to go back to your communities, back to your states, back to your countries, and say, 'What can I do to really make a difference?' Regardless of the budget, how many of you know that you'll never have enough money? How many of you know that there

will always be issues? But true greatness exceeds the parameters of superficial limitations. Many of those limitations you cannot control, but you can control your own progress. And I want to challenge you that it's time to go to the next level, not just as an Association, not just as a Congress, but more importantly as an individual."



Tuesday's General Session speaker Rick Rigsby delivered an inspiring message about leaving a legacy and making an impact.

His presentation equal parts entertaining, inspiring and, ultimately, heartbreaking, Rigsby shared life lessons he learned from his father, an uneducated man who had to leave school in the third grade to help with the family farm. His description late in the program about the deaths in subsequent years of his wife and father, and the impact that both of his loved ones had on his life, was one of the most moving experiences in recent memory at our General Sessions. For my part, I'll wager there wasn't a dry eye in the house.

So how does one go about making an impact after listening to such a presentation? For this editor the choice was an easy one. After a full day of attending sessions, touring the exhibit hall with my ad reps and breaking down the *Reporter* booth, it would have been easy in the late afternoon to pack it in and head back to my hotel. Instead, inspired by Rigsby's message, I stopped by the Proud to Care Blood Drive and donated a pint of blood (and saw a couple of Board members donating as well). Even if that was the only impact I made that week in San Antonio, it brought real satisfaction, and I encourage you to take part in the drive next year in New Orleans.

Future's Day a hit with students

The annual APWA Future's Day event, held this year on Congress Tuesday, was an important opportunity for our membership to encourage college and high school students to pursue a career in public works. This event enables the students to open direct lines of communication with public works professionals, and it's a tool that allows our members and future members to better prepare for the future of public works.

"Over 30 students participated in Future's Day," said Kristina Ramirez, Project Manager with Bury+Partners of Temple, Texas. "APWA President Larry Frevert and Texas Chapter President-Elect Jason Cosby were on hand to welcome the students and to give them insight on the many sides of public works. After the morning session, the students were teamed up with Texas Chapter members and given a guided tour of the exhibit hall. In the afternoon the students were given a tour of the ITS Transguide Facility."

Mixing it up

In an effort to mix things up a bit, and to keep the APWA Congress education program fresh and relevant to the diverse needs of the public works audience, APWA introduced “Workshop Wednesday” at the 2007 Congress. “Participants were able to choose from twelve different workshop topics, including performance management, equipment replacement and fleet charge-back systems, urban forestry, public outreach, traffic incident response, community-based social marketing, training the public works trainer, and planning and responding to terrorism/WMD incidents,” said Karen Wilson, APWA Project Manager for Adult Learning.

According to Wilson, three workshops included the unique opportunity to not only hear about innovative processes and strategies, but to actually see the systems and projects firsthand. “These workshops included an onsite demonstration of street reconstruction technologies, a tour of improvement projects along the San Antonio River, and a chance to see San Antonio’s intelligent transportation system in action,” she said.

Stormwater Summit breaks new ground

So many APWA members’ communities are struggling with NPDES requirements that it just made sense to devote a full-day event at Congress to stormwater. “Wednesday’s Stormwater Summit had a great turnout,” said Colene Vogel, Technical Services Program Manager on the APWA staff. “The morning sessions were crowded with people anxious to hear from EPA’s Benjamin Grumbles in the first session and the panel from Phase I and Phase II communities in the second session. Members from APWA’s Water Resources Management Technical Committee served as moderators and monitors during the Summit. They were thrilled to see their idea come to such fruitful fruition.”



The room was crowded during the full-day Public Works Stormwater Summit on Congress Wednesday.

The Summit broke for the Closing General Session and lunch, but offered attendees two tracks for the afternoon. The Program Track focused on administration, permitting and public outreach. The Technical Track covered BMPs and information sharing. “All of the sessions had great participation,” Vogel said. “Audience members asked questions and really got into the nitty gritty of stormwater programs.”

Encouraging behavior change

Wednesday’s Closing General Session speaker, Doug McKenzie-Mohr, Ph.D., may not have gone for the laughs of Dave Barry, or the personal inspiration of Rick Rigsby, but I can assure you that he delivered words of wisdom that were right up the public works professional’s alley. A former professor at St. Thomas University in Fredericton, New Brunswick and current head of McKenzie-Mohr Associates, Dr. McKenzie-Mohr has helped with projects focusing on waste reduction and recycling, water and energy efficiency, pollution prevention and watershed protection, transportation, climate change and long-term sustainability challenges. He has assisted in Canada’s public education efforts on climate change and has also served on Canada’s National Round Table on the Environment and the Economy. His message to the APWA audience that morning dealt with methods to promote sustainable behavior, and how public works can benefit from the ever-growing scientific body of knowledge on climate change.



Doug McKenzie-Mohr, our speaker at the Closing General Session, provided words of wisdom to the attendees regarding methods to promote sustainable behavior.

“Many of you are working on trying to bring about behavioral changes that support sustainability,” he said. “We need to bring about waste reduction activities, we need to get people engaged in energy efficiency, reducing carbon dioxide emissions, and the list goes on and on and on. In all of those areas, behavioral change is central. If we cannot find ways to get people to engage in behavior that’s consistent with what we need to do to move toward sustainability, we’ll have a very difficult time with that.”

Throughout his presentation McKenzie-Mohr provided examples of ways to get people to change their thinking and behavior regarding sustainable issues. “Let’s imagine that you’ve got a great mass transit system,” he said, “but that not as many people as you’d like are actually using that mass transit system. From a social marketing perspective, I’d encourage you to look at ways to discourage people from single-occupant driving and make it more likely in the downtown core that they’re actually using the mass transit system. They’ve done this in the City of Toronto. They’ve raised the price of parking and they’ve used traffic calming to make it more challenging for people to travel through some of the residential areas. There’s a variety of changes that they’ve made such as having very small parking lots besides some of the largest public areas that people would want to go to, like the SkyDome where the Blue Jays play. If you look at the parking that’s available right around there, there’s a strong inducement for people to use mass transit

rather than be thinking about driving into those areas.”

Doin’ the Texas two-step thing

Wednesday evening’s Banquet began with the traditional introduction and procession of APWA’s Executive Committee and their spouses. Then President Frevert took the stage and recognized the Board of Directors, the Top Ten Public Works Leaders of the Year, the Texas Host Chapter and volunteers, Past Presidents in attendance, and international guests from 14 countries. He also presented plaques to outgoing Past President Bob Freudenthal; Howard LaFever, outgoing Director of Region II; and Dale Houdeshell, outgoing Director of Region VI. Finally, he presented Immediate Past President Bill Verkest with the APWA Past President’s plaque and thanked him for his leadership and service.

Following the presentation of the special awards, the nearly

800 Banquet guests were served a delicious dinner of Beef Tenderloin with Port Demi Glace and Red Snapper Filet with Seared Spinach and Lemons, Creamy Shiitake Risotto, and finally (oh baby) Warm Molten Chocolate Cake with Gran Marnier and Crème Englaise. (If you haven’t guessed yet, the Banquet dinners are always the icing on the cake of a great Congress.) After dinner, President Frevert again took the stage and discussed a number of challenges we face together in the coming year. Among these challenges are the problems of diminished water supply across much of the western and southwestern parts of the U.S., the potential for rolling brownouts due to our overloaded power grids, and the fact that each of us generates close to five pounds of solid waste per day. “I ask you to accept one or more of these challenges you will personally take on for the better of APWA and public works in general,” he said.

APWA and FEMA sign Memorandum of Understanding

Something very special took place at this year’s annual APWA Congress and Exposition in San Antonio, Texas. Yet, like most of the work done by public works officials around the world, this important event took place without much fanfare in a small room on the outskirts of the convention center. Nevertheless, it was a milestone for the American Public Works Association. On September 11, 2007, APWA signed an updated “Memorandum of Understanding” (MOU) with the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). The agreement will serve as a framework for the next several years of relationship building between the two organizations.

The updated memorandum, signed on the anniversary of the terrorist attacks in New York City, at the Pentagon in Virginia, and Pennsylvania, came on the heels of an important meeting between APWA leadership and FEMA Administrator R. David Paulison in Washington, D.C., where the leaders of both organizations discussed continuing issues affecting public works officials in the Gulf States, reaffirmed their commitment to better communication during disasters, and agreed to open up new possibilities to work together in the future on such topics as education and training. One of the



Past President Bill Verkest, FEMA’s Carlos Castillo and President Larry Frevert enjoy a light moment at the luncheon following the signing of the APWA-FEMA Memorandum of Understanding.

first steps in this new era of cooperation was the signing of the MOU.

APWA has always maintained a strong relationship with FEMA. However, the signing of the MOU is significant in many ways. For starters, the agreement is a statement of intent by each party to work with one another to “promote greater understanding and coordination of emergency management programs, such as mitigation, preparedness, response, and recovery carried out by emergency services personnel, including public works and emergency officials in communities across America.” But beyond this intent, the MOU is officially authorized by Congress, via the Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Assistance Act (Stafford Act).

APWA President Larry Frevert expressed his enthusiasm for the agreement in simple words: “This agree-

ment shows FEMA’s recognition of public works professionals and their role as first responders and represents a major advance in providing for our members and all of the public works community to have access to the training, equipment, resources and recognition so much deserved as we stand arm in arm with our public service professionals from fire, police and emergency services in assisting Americans with disaster recovery.”

While Mr. Paulison was originally scheduled to sign the document in San Antonio, he was unfortunately required to testify before the U.S. Congress on the day of the signing. However, FEMA Assistant Administrator for Disaster Preparedness, Carlos Castillo, was able to attend in his place.

To ensure the relationship is not just limited to paper, President Frevert adds, “I have tasked our FEMA Advisory Task Force to meet at least annually with FEMA representatives in an ‘across the table’ exchange. These professionals will serve as our ‘think tank’ experts as we further advance the roles and responsibilities of the public works community in emergency preparedness and response.”

Contributed by Dan Jensen, APWA Government Affairs Manager, djensen@apwa.net



It was a busy week for President Frevert, but he found time at the Banquet to sit with his mother, Annie, and father, Paul.

Frevert closed by asking the attendees to consider coming to the 2008 Congress in New Orleans early for a community work day. "I hope you will be with us for Congress in August 2008 as we fulfill the promise made by our Past President Bob Freudenthal when he announced, 'We will come to New Orleans.' I also ask you to consider coming in to be there for Friday, August 15, and join your Board of Directors for a charitable service project with the St. Bernard's Parish."

For the rest of the evening the audience was treated to the country and rock 'n roll sounds of the Rick Cavender Band. Plenty of folks got out on the dance floor to try out their version of the Texas two-step. And as the saying goes, a good time was had by all.

Get out your calendars

What a terrific Congress. From all accounts, attendees and exhibitors alike had an outstanding time, and despite the natural challenges of hosting the show, the Texas Chapter members and my colleagues on the APWA staff enjoyed it as well. Now it's time to set the stage for next year's show in New Orleans, August 17-20. Put it on your calendar. Come early to work. Come early to play. Give blood, give time, give support. Not only will you get a potful of education, you'll be providing valuable financial help to the New Orleans community in the process. Now *that*, my friends, is making an impact. See you there.

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