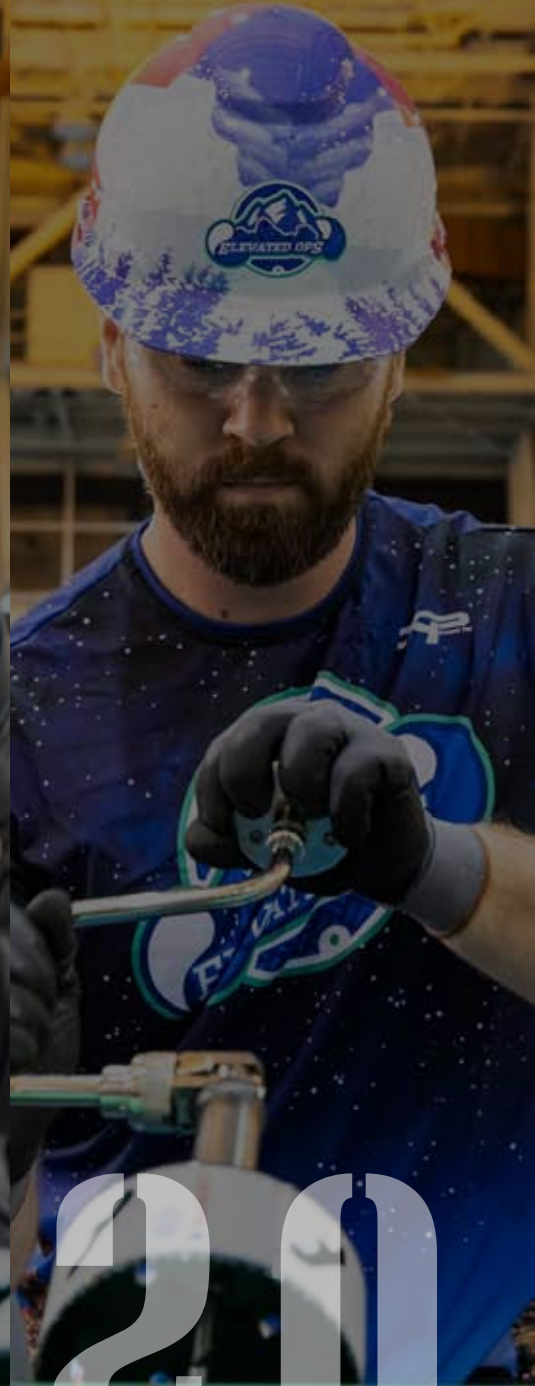


OPERATIONS



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CHALLENGE



TRA CREWSERS TAKE HOME DIVISION 1 TITLE FOR SEVENTH TIME

The Trinity River Authority (TRA; Dallas) CReWSers this year battled their way to the top spot in Division 1. This win marks the seventh overall victory for the team from the Water Environment Association of Texas (WEAT) since becoming the first Operations Challenge squad from Texas to win the competition in 2005.

This year's TRA CReWSers veterans included competitors Jacob Burwell and Raudel Juarez and coach Steve Price, who have each been with the team for more than a decade. The team also continues to recruit new competitors, bringing on Mark Reeves for his victorious first year. Captain Quintin Winters, a 3-year TRA CReWSeR member, says creating a multi-generational team is important.

Competing alongside TRA CReWSeR legends adds pressure, Winters said, but also "motivates you to live up to everything that's come before." And despite a record that cements the TRA CReWSers as one of Operations Challenge's most successful teams of all time, Winters says the crew has not lost sight of the competition's ability to "bring people in, have them build their skillset, and not just be limited to their own specific job functions."

The TRA CReWSers won first place in the Process Control Event and second place in the Collection Systems and Laboratory events.



Raudel Juarez, Jacob Burwell, captain Quintin Winters, and Mark Reed spring into action to complete the KSB Maintenance Event. Kieffer Photography



The TRA CReWSers from the Water Environment Association of Texas won first place in Division 1 after strong showings in the Process Control, Collections Systems, and Laboratory Events. The victory marks the team's seventh overall Operations Challenge win. Kieffer Photography



CHALLENGE 2018

FLEXIBILITY IS KEY TO VICTORY FOR SECOND-PLACE OCWA JETS

Despite the OCWA Jets living more than an hour apart from each other, the team from the Water Environment Association of Ontario came together to win second place in Division 1. The team earned first-place awards in the Safety and Collection Systems events.

Team captain Jason Mank says support from management at the Ontario Clean Water Agency (OCWA; Toronto), work ethic, and open communication were the keys to their success. The team – Mank, Al Robdrup, Stephanie Baronette, Tom Nicol, and coach Marcel Misuraca – would not have been able to meet up to practice without flexibility from management, fellow OCWA operators, and each other.

“We all had to make an effort and sacrifices as a team and organization,” Mank said. “This shows in how well we all get along.”



Tom Nicol, Al Robdrup, and captain Jason Mank of the Water Environment Association of Ontario OCWA Jets work to complete the Collection Systems Event. Kieffer Photography

ELEVATED OPS SOARS PAST LABORATORY EVENT FOR THIRD-PLACE WIN



Lance Wenholz, Matt Duncan, Kelsey Gedge, and Josh Malloreoy pitch in to complete a pipe repair in the Collection Systems Event. Kieffer Photography

During their Division 1 debut, Elevated Ops from the Rocky Mountain Water Environment Association won third place by transforming a weakness into a strength.

The team, which includes Matt Duncan, Lance Wenholz, Josh Malloreoy, captain Kelsey Gedge, and coach Orren West, has finished near the top in most events during its last few years of competition. But the Laboratory Event has been consistently the team's greatest challenge, said Gedge.

“We spent extra time leading up to this year's competition giving more attention to detail to minimize potential penalties in this event,” Gedge said. “It was nice to finally have our penalty time be less than our raw time.”

The team's hard work paid off. Elevated Ops took first place in the Laboratory Event, and second place in the Safety and Process Control events.

– Justin Jacques, WE&T

POOSEIDONS BEAT THE ODDS TO BECOME DIVISION 2 CHAMPS

The Water Environment Association of Texas (WEAT) Pooseidons – Bennie Frazier, Justin Dean, Chris Dunlop, captain Chris Legg, and coach Robert Burgess – left New Orleans as Division 2 champions.

The team, performing in the national competition for their first year, overcame a second major disadvantage: none of the Pooseidons work at a water resource recovery facility; they manage collection systems for North Richland Hills (Texas). For that reason, the team found the Process Control Event particularly difficult, Legg said.

Support from management and co-workers enabled the Pooseidons to spend several weeks at the Trinity River Authority (TRA; Dallas) facility practicing alongside Division 1 winners and WEAT colleagues the TRA CReWSers. The TRA CReWSers played a “big brother” role during training sessions, Burgess said.

“We had what we thought was a good understanding until we came over and started learning ... Process Control, that really showed us how little we knew,” Legg said.

The Pooseidons achieved the highest score in the Collection Systems Event and finished within the top 10 teams in the Process Control Event.



Members of the Water Environment Association of Texas team, the Pooseidons, Justin Dean, Bennie Frazier, Chris Dunlop, and Chris Legg, work together in the Laboratory Event. Kieffer Photography



Justin Dean focuses on making an accurate pour in the Laboratory Event. Kieffer Photography



Water Environment Association of Texas Pooseidons Chris Legg and Justin Dean grapple with the Process Control Event, a particularly difficult task since none of the Pooseidons work at a water resource recovery facility, Legg said. Kieffer Photography

CHALLENGE 2018

PENALTIES DO NOT DETER SECOND-PLACE WASTE WARRIORS FROM SUCCESS

During practice sessions this year, second-place Division 2 champions the Waste Warriors focused on training new people and preparing for new events. The team from the Water Environment Association of Texas added two fresh competitors to its roster this year and spent much of its time practicing for the revamped KSB (Frankenthal; Germany) Maintenance Event, said coach and captain Clifford Woods.

The beginning of the KSB Maintenance Event went according to plan, Woods said. But near the end of the run, the Waste Warriors made an error returning the event's submersible pump to the wet well. This cost the team precious seconds in the event.

"As a team, we didn't lose our cool," Woods said. "We stayed focused and went after it and finished the event. Overall, what made the team a success was the willpower and the bonding of the guys that I'm proud to say are my teammates."

The Waste Warriors include Woods, Howard Williams, Rudy Valdez, and Gary Carr. The team finished second in the KSB Maintenance Event and scored among the top 10 teams in the Safety and Collection Systems events.



Waste Warriors Rudy Valdez and Gary Carr mix chemicals under pressure during the Laboratory Event. The team placed second overall in Division 2. Kieffer Photography

TIME MANAGEMENT PAYS OFF FOR THIRD-PLACE WASATCH ALL STARS

Members of third-place Division 2 winners the Wasatch All Stars did not let the distance between their home facilities become an obstacle to victory. The All Stars, who are from the Water Environment Association of Utah, picked up third place in the KSB Maintenance Event and

finished fifth in the Safety Event.

Members of the team – Brent Jones, Devin Sagers, Taylor Byrum, captain Shawn Groberg, and coach Todd Smart – are spread across Utah. Getting together often enough to prepare for the competition was a challenge for the team, Groberg said. This distance forced them to use their time together as efficiently as possible.

Groberg says the All Stars were not surprised that the KSB Maintenance Event was their most successful. They made adapting to the event's new format a major priority during training.

"The advice I would give for next year's teams is to practice as much as you can, utilize your time, and make it count," Groberg said.

– Justin Jacques, WE&T

On their way to earning third in Division 2, Wasatch All Stars captain Shawn Groberg, Brent Jones, Devin Sagers, and Taylor Byrum (not pictured) work together to complete the Collection Systems Event. Kieffer Photography



OPERATIONS CHALLENGE HEROES AID CARIBBEAN HURRICANE RECOVERY



Left, an old water distribution pipe damaged during Hurricane Maria lies on a river bed in Dominica. Right, a new distribution pipe is being hung along the river. Marcel Misuraca/Ontario Clean Water Agency

Hurricane Maria hit the small Caribbean island of Dominica as a Category 5 storm in September 2017. The storm took out electricity as well as destroyed the water and wastewater infrastructure.

In December 2017, two Operations Challenge competitors took time off from their jobs to help restore Dominica's drinking water and wastewater treatment services.

Marcel Misuraca and Jason Mank, members of the OCWA Jets from Water Environment Association of Ontario heeded the call for help. Joined by Glen Ketchum, an operator from Alberta, Canada, the OCWA Jets members spent 2 weeks volunteering for the Operators Without Borders program.

"As soon as we got there, we unloaded our gear and went right to work," Misuraca said. Mank and Ketchum worked to repair the wastewater facility, Misuraca worked to fix the drinking water system.

PILOT PROGRAM BEGINS THE WORK OF OPERATORS WITHOUT BORDERS

The disaster in Dominica inspired the creation of the new organization, Operators Without Borders. Valerie Jenkinson, CEO of World Water and Wastewater Solutions (Vancouver, Canada), decided to start the program after hearing about the cataclysmic storm damage on Dominica. Jenkinson first learned about the damage during a Caribbean Water and Wastewater Association conference in October 2017. Bernard Errinoffe, general manager of DOWASCO, which is the water and wastewater utility of Dominica, spoke at the conference to explain the need that the utility faced.

Jenkinson got to work organizing a response. She conducts training for water resource recovery facility staff both in the Caribbean and Canada. She began soliciting for volunteers and donations during conferences and training sessions.

One of these stops was at Misuraca's and Mank's agency, the Ontario Clean Water Agency (Waterloo, Ontario). "She needed licensed operators to go down and basically help them get their infrastructure back in shape," Mank said.

Jenkinson was able to coordinate the pilot test of the Operators Without Borders program by sending the three Canadian operators to work on the ground in Dominica. "They were able to contribute not just their labor, but their knowledge and expertise," she said.

Fundraising covered flights and assisted with meals for the operators. Jenkinson coordinated the trip as well as a place for



Jason Mank and Marcel Misuraca, members of the OCWA Jets, and Glen Ketchum, another operator from Canada, spent 2 weeks repairing wastewater and water treatment infrastructure in Dominica. Marcel Misuraca/Ontario Clean Water Agency

CHALLENGE 2018



A maze of pumps needed to be set up to begin restoration work in Dominica. Marcel Misuraca, Ontario Clean Water Agency

them to stay. The trio of Canadian operators packed such tools and supplies as safety gear, wrenches, and electrical testing equipment. "Between all three of us we had almost 150 pounds of luggage," Mank said.

WORKING IN DECIMATED DOMINICA SHOWS VALUE OF WATER

Soon after arriving in Dominica, Misuraca and Mank realized the extreme level of destruction from damaged rainforests to torn-apart roads. Residents walked to gather water all day, every day, Misuraca said. "We take it for granted: going to that tap and taking a drink of water."

Some people were living in buildings torn open to the elements. Others had set up tarps in the local park as makeshift homes. They even watched a nearby house collapse because of its crumbling foundation.

"We were shocked," Misuraca said. "It was hard to see."

The water resource recovery facility in Roseau, Dominica's capital city, sits on the oceanfront near a river. The storm surge "washed away the main sewer line that would cross the river," Mank said.

He worked with the local water authority to excavate in the river and plug the sewer lines so the wastewater facility could begin operating. This required using pumps to remove intruding water from pipes, checking the electrical integrity of three pump stations and the main facility, washing salt off everything (ocean-water had intruded the entire facility), and restoring services.

"We were able to bring the main plant on and

start processing water," Mank said.

Misuraca worked with local operators as well as other volunteers in the mountains to get the drinking water treatment facility back online. He traveled 2 hours each day to the facility. Equipment needed for the repairs was locked up and guarded by security every night to prevent theft, he said.

After installing about 550 m (1800 ft) of pipes and working full days for 2 weeks, the Operators Without Borders team helped reestablish water services to three villages.

"It was definitely rewarding, and I would do it again in a heartbeat," Mank said. "We had such a great experience."

Misuraca and Mank said that they can see a similar storm hitting the area in the future. They expressed concern about what it would do to the already weakened infrastructure. To be ready to help if that happens, Jenkinson is working to establish the program as a charity. She is setting up teams to help in any countries that need help when disasters strike.

"We hope to be able to provide teams that can be deployed whenever disasters and emergencies occur to help restore water and services to areas and countries," she said.

— Jennifer Fulcher, WE&T

Introducing the new KSB Maintenance Event



Operations Challenge evolves each year to test the ability of wastewater operators to confront the sector's newest and most troublesome threats. The KSB (Frankenthal, Germany) Maintenance Event was the new challenge for 2018. This event, for the first time in Operations Challenge history, presented competitors with arc flash risks and running water in the maintenance event. Teams had to restore a simulated "pump station" to normal operating conditions after the pumps were impaired by nonflushable wipes.

Teams worked together to secure the pump station against electrical hazards, perform routine pump maintenance including replacing an impeller, and restore the pump to working condition faster than their competitors.

CHARLIE'S ANGELS MAKES HISTORY AS FIRST ALL-FEMALE TEAM

Four women made history at Operations Challenge 2018. Team captain Melissa Engle, coach Sarah Hickman, and members Morgan Greathouse and Candace Mathis formed the first all-female team to compete at a national event.

The Water Environment Association of South Carolina team is named Charlie's Angels. They are named in tribute to their home facility's giant, blue methane tank nicknamed Charlie, Engle said.

The team formed 2 years ago and this year performed well enough in their state Operations Challenge event to earn a spot at the WEFTEC competition. Hickman organized the team at the encouragement of David Wiman, superintendent of the City of Columbia (S.C.) Metro Wastewater Treatment.

"He had this idea about an all-female team," Hickman said. Finding team members proved easier than normal because about a quarter of the facility's staff are women.

"We're excited for the opportunity and hopefully within a year or two, we won't be the only women's team sitting here," Engle said. She also hopes that soon the competition will have an equal ratio of women to men on teams.

DIVERSE BEGINNINGS ADVANCED BY OPERATIONS CHALLENGE

Hickman has a degree in chemistry and Engle has a degree in marine science, but each started their careers in different commercial laboratories where they would test water samples. When jobs opened at the facility that sent them samples, they followed their curiosity about where the samples came from and were drawn into the water sector.

"Instead of working somewhere analyzing everybody's samples, I wanted to learn where the samples came from," Engle said.

Mathis returned to working as an operator after taking time off for her family, and she originally stumbled on the opportunity when searching for a job. Greathouse's stepmother worked as an operator training new operators. Greathouse sat in on a class and really enjoyed it. When the facility posted a job opening, she applied and was hired.

And Operations Challenge has benefitted their

careers. "I never left the lab previous to this, and now I'm considering getting a license," Engle said. Participating on the team and competing helps her get to know others in the facility, understand where samples in the laboratory come from, and more quickly fix the problems that she discovers through lab testing, she said.

— Jennifer Fulcher, WE&T



Charlie's Angels from the Water Environment Association of South Carolina, made history as the first all-female team to compete at the national Operations Challenge competition. Out of 37 Division 2 teams, the team placed 18th overall, earning seventh in the Laboratory Event and eighth in the Process Control Event.

Kieffer Photography

FROM OPERATOR-IN-TRAINING TO OPERATIONS CHALLENGE COMPETITOR

Until a couple years ago, Alexis Surprenant didn't know much about working in wastewater. She became interested when her grandfather, a retired biosolids professional, told her about the King County Wastewater Treatment Division (Seattle) Operator-In-Training (OIT) program.

At age 23, Surprenant toured the King County South Treatment Plant with her grandfather. She learned more about the program and decided to apply. "It's this awesome program where basically it's on-the-job training to become an operator," she said.

That was in 2016; now, 2 years later, Surprenant is a group 1 operator for King County and competed at Operations Challenge 2018 as a member of the Pacific Northwest Clean Water Association (PNCWA) Muddy Waters.

TRAINING PROGRAM INSPIRES A NEW GENERATION OF OPERATORS

In December 2016, Surprenant started the OIT program. The program allows participants to participate in classroom-style learning as well as hands-on training for 3 months at a time at different facilities. This enables participants to learn about the full spectrum of the county's facilities and wastewater processes as well as to get to know different employees on different shifts. "It's really a dynamic and integral approach to operators in training," she said.

Surprenant earned her OIT certificate after 6 months. She received her operator credentials after 1 year. In December 2017, she applied for employment in King County. She now works on the collection systems for the South Treatment Plant and is striving to earn her group 2 license.

JOINING OPERATIONS CHALLENGE FACILITATES TEAM BUILDING AND COMMUNITY OUTREACH

While in an OIT class, Surprenant learned about Operations Challenge and the facility's team, the Poo Fighters. Later, she talked to other operators about the team; one was the team's captain who invited her to a practice and offered to help her join the team.

"I like being part of a team. I think it's very important, in life, but also in your career," Surprenant said. She joined the team in June 2017 and competed on the Poo Fighters at WEFTEC 2017. This year two PNCWA teams – the Poo Fighters and River Rangers – combined to form Muddy Waters.

In addition to competing, the team also participates in community outreach activities. This is one of the best things about belonging to the team, Surprenant said. Team members attend

public events to educate about wastewater treatment and careers in the water sector.

This year, the team went to the 2018 Washington Women in Trades career fair. They set up a booth that showcased the pipe-cutting portion of the Operations Challenge Collection Systems Event and discussed careers in wastewater and the OIT program. "It was really exciting for me because it means that I'm being heard and that people really are interested in what I have to say," Surprenant said.

Wastewater is a very stable sector to work in because "there's always going to be water that needs to be cleaned," Surprenant said. "This is my career for the rest of my life."

"One of the things I really like about [wastewater] is that not only are you coming to work ... but you're changing the environment," Surprenant said. "I'm making a difference."

– Jennifer Fulcher, WE&T



Alexis Surprenant finishes cutting pipe in the Collection Systems Event at WEFTEC 2018. Kieffer Photography

OPERATIONS CHALLENGE

DISTANCE NOT AN ISSUE FOR SIX INTERNATIONAL OPERATIONS CHALLENGE TEAMS

For more than three decades, Operations Challenge has grown to become an international phenomenon. This year, six teams crossed national borders to meet in New Orleans for the chance to test their mettle against the world's most-skilled wastewater operators. The teams, four from Canada and two from South America, all say they received a warm welcome – and an intense challenge – from their U.S. rivals.



Can't Flush This – British Columbia Water & Waste Association

Can't Flush This, a British Columbia Water and Waste Association team, includes Ben Lytwyn, Shane Burr, Alistair Asher, and coach and captain Dan Deacon. The team competed in similar events in Canada but were surprised by the size and scope of the U.S. competition. "The intensity level of [Operations Challenge at WEFTEC] is just way above where we were. The events are a lot more involved," Lytwyn said. "But everyone here has been super great and really supportive." Kieffer Photography



Ashbridges High Levels – Water Environment Association of Ontario

The Ashbridges High Levels, a Water Environment Association of Ontario team, consists of Brandon Collins, Kevin Round, Anthony de la Cruz, captain Michael Pelzowski, and coach Chris McDonald. "There's a lot of pressure involved, which makes it easier when you get to the job and something happens," Collins said, referring to the Safety Event. "You can relax because you've already been through something super stressful." Kieffer Photography



OCWA Jets – Water Environment Association of Ontario

The OCWA Jets, a Water Environment Association of Ontario team, includes Al Robdrup, Stephanie Baronette, Tom Nicol, captain Jason Mank, and coach Marcel Misuraca. "There's a great camaraderie between all the teams. Everybody gets along really well and cheers each other on," Misuraca said. Kieffer Photography

CHALLENGE 2018



Sludgehammers – Water Environment Association of Ontario

The Sludgehammers, a Water Environment Association of Ontario (WEAO) team, includes captain Nicholas Koot, Scott Meier, Adam Hubers, Dave Middleton, and coach Andy Griffin. “Each year, both at WEAO and WEFTEC the bar seems to rise, and opposing teams continue to get smarter, faster, and tougher than in the past,” Koot said. *Rahkia Nance/WEF*



Acueducto de Bogota – ACODAL

Acueducto de Bogota, an ACODAL (La Asociación Colombiana de Ingeniería Sanitaria y Ambiental) team, consists of Carlos Martinez, Luis Carlos Herrera, Nilson Perdomo, captain Ramiro Bayona, and coach Luis Eduardo Silva. “It is an honor both for the company we represent and for us as people and professionals to be here representing Colombia,” Silva said. Martinez added, “We didn’t feel like we were foreign people here. We feel like we belong here.” *Kieffer Photography*



AySA 4KV – AIDIS

AySA 4KV, an AIDIS (Asociación Argentina de Ingeniería Sanitaria y Ciencias del Ambiente) team, includes Nicolás Couso, Ariel Acosta, Sebastián Lomazzi, and coach and captain Pablo Quiroga. According to the team, the U.S. Operations Challenge competition uses different rules and equipment than a similar event in Argentina, making preparation more complex. “It’s like driving an American car versus a Volkswagen,” Couso said. *Kieffer Photography*

OPERATIONS CHALLENGE

SPREADING THE COMPETITION ONE NEW TEAM AT A TIME



Brad Yeagle overlooks Centennials team members – Ron Moler, Michael Marinelli, Jeremy Willis, and Miquel Malcolm – as they compete in the Laboratory Event. Kieffer Photography

When Bradley Yeagle started a new job at the Washington Suburban Sanitary Commission (WSSC; Laurel, Md.), he wanted to help the facility form an Operations Challenge team.

Yeagle had been a member of the Chesapeake Water Environment Association (CWEA) team, Motley Poo, since it formed in 2013, but he left Maryland Environmental Service (Millersville) and the team in May 2017.

Even though Yeagle competed on another CWEA team, Rogue Ops, at WEFTEC 2017, he knew WSSC had been interested in starting its own team. In December 2017, he gave a presentation outlining the costs of equipment and other needs for starting a new team to the management at his new facility. Management approved, and the Centennials were formed. The team included coaches Yeagle and Marty Johnson, captain Ron Moler, and members Michael Marinelli, Jeremy Willis, and Miquel Malcolm; they came from WSSC's four different water resource recovery facilities.

Yeagle immediately began collecting equipment for each event. "The biggest challenge that I've had was getting all the equipment secured," he said. Team practices began in April with a focus on the Laboratory Event.

Yeagle provided the new team with a little bit of an edge: He has kept a history of the run times and scores from all the teams he has been on and provided this institutional knowledge to the new competitors.

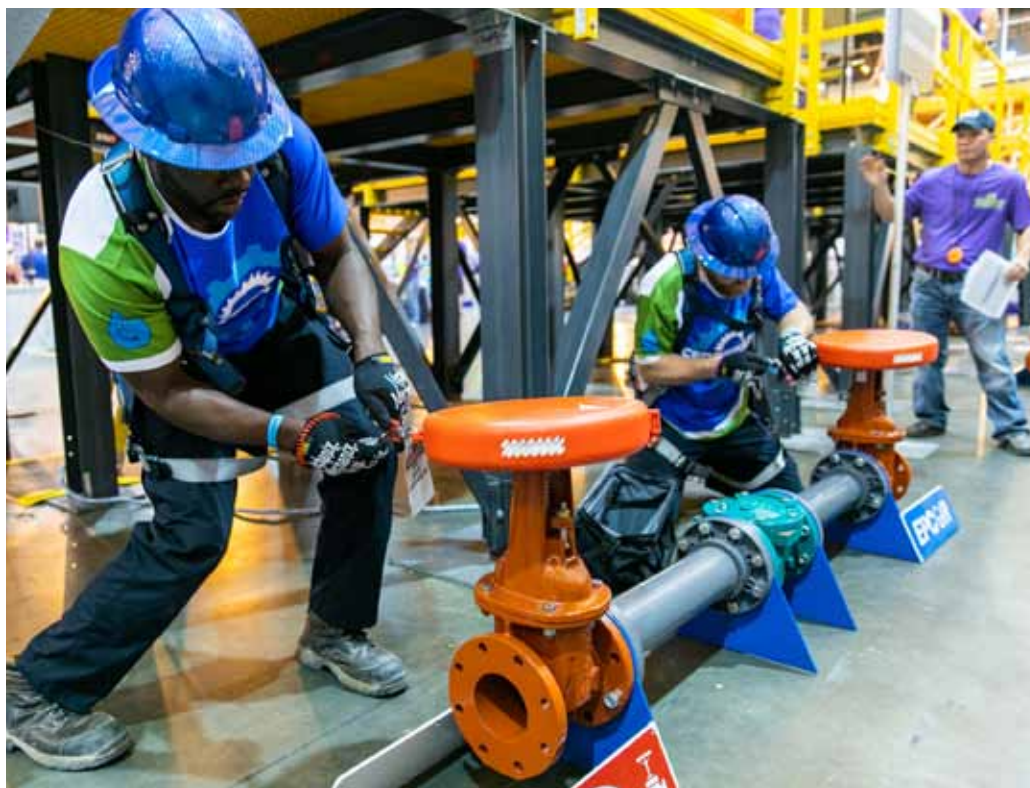
Yeagle recommends Operations Challenge to help keep operators' skills and knowledge sharp. Participants learn areas of wastewater treatment that they may not see every day and make connections with other teams that become a network of resources. "It grows the operations people quite a bit," he said.

The best strategy for new teams, Yeagle said, is to focus on communication. Communicating with your own team members builds a bond, enhances teamwork, and facilitates trying new ideas and strategies. He also advised asking other teams for feedback. Even at competitions, teams



Yeagle (right) explains the steps of the KSB Maintenance Event to new competitors. Kieffer Photography

CHALLENGE 2018



often will share advice and tips on how to improve performance, he said. He also suggests taking notes, keeping a record of everything, and participating in as many competitions as possible. "You learn a lot at the competitions."

"[Operations Challenge] gets in your blood," Yeakle said. He added that he plans to always continue participating in some capacity. This year he switched from competing to more of a mentorship role this year. "You measure success in many different ways," he said. "At first, it's trying to win, and, now, it's trying to grow somebody."

— Jennifer Fulcher, WE&T

Members of the Centennials work side-by-side during the Safety Event. Kieffer Photography

Remembering Jim Miller



Jim Miller, 30-year participant in the Water Environment Federation (Alexandria, Va.) Operations Challenge competition, died May 21.

"He was a great mentor," said Chris Lefebvre, member of the Central States Water Environment Association team, the Pumpers. Lefebvre started competing in Operations Challenge 6 years ago and was coached by Miller.

"Jim loved the ability to come in and train four to six new people every year," Lefebvre said.

In addition to helping competitors train, Miller loved working to protect the environment and enjoyed the outdoors and water-related recreational activities such as fishing. "He was 100% dedicated to water and wastewater," Lefebvre said.

The images above show Jim Miller examining a pump during the first Operations Challenge competition in 1988 and at his last national Operations Challenge in 2017. Find more stories about Miller's dedication to Operations Challenge online at www.weftec.org/OC2018.

POOSEIDONS EXPAND SKILLS AT OPERATIONS CHALLENGE COMPETITION

Within 3 years of learning about Operations Challenge and forming a team, the Water Environment Association (WEA) of Texas Pooseidons won first place overall in Division 2 at the national competition.

The team, which includes coach Robert Burgess, captain Chris Legg, Bennie Frazier, Justin Dean, Chris Dunlop, and alternate Chris Talley, defied the odds to claim this ranking. Team members manage collection systems in North Richland Hills (Texas) and typically do not encounter many of the wastewater treatment processes and technology featured in the competition.

When their utility's superintendent suggested creating an Operations Challenge team in 2015, none of the five team members had heard about the competition, but the opportunity offered a chance to increase their knowledge and benefit the city. "It seemed like the perfect opportunity from a professional development, from a training aspect," Burgess said. And the team has learned a lot, especially from the Process Control Event.

"I guess our energy and enthusiasm got us invited to New Orleans 2 years ago. We got a feel for [the competition] and have since put a lot of dedication into it," Dean said.

During the past 3 years, their skills and camaraderie have grown. "We have grown a lot just in our teamwork and spending so much time together," Dean said. "At our normal work times they'll put us in a group together just because they know we work so well together."

The team attributes some of its success in competition to the support, guidance, and instruction received from the TRA CReWSers, another WEA of Texas team. Because the Pooseidons do not have a facility to train in, team members drove 20 minutes to the TRA CReWSers facility in Dallas. Both teams



The Water Environment Association (WEA) of Texas Pooseidons developed new skills and knowledge to earn first place overall in Division 2. Kieffer Photography

sometimes would practice simultaneously, which helped the Pooseidons enhance their performance and speed.

"The TRA CReWSers have really helped us out and brought us along and showed us how to get started" Dunlap said. "TRA was kind of like the big brother when we first got our feet wet ... from that day-one they set the example of what we were doing and what it would require."

The team's success, teamwork, and professional development was inspirational, Burgess said. "I get to help these guys and watch these guys grow individually as professionals, I get to see them use all of these different tools that they gain. It catapults them professionally in their own jobs."

— Katherine Saltzman, WE&T

During Operations Challenge 2018, Mike Ross asked competitors for input on one last wastewater calculation. Ross, who retired from his 13-year tenure as chair of the Process Control Event, wanted to estimate how much wastewater is treated by the approximately 250 people involved in Operations Challenge. He included competitors, coaches, judges, and volunteers in his calculation. He estimates that just under 907 million kg (2 billion lb) of biochemical oxygen demand were removed in the past year by Operations Challenge contributors.

Ross also reflected on the changes made to the Process Control Event over the years to "give teams multiple ways to show what they know." Event organizers have helped improve how scores are calculated. Division 1 and 2 teams now both receive the same test. Teams also now get 5 minutes to strategize before spending 20 minutes completing the test, he said.

"The big change was 3 years ago when Hydromantis (Hamilton, Ontario) developed their process simulator and we integrated it into the event," Ross said. "That software adds another dimension to demonstration of knowledge because it mimics what operators do every day." Kieffer Photography



CHALLENGE 2018



Competitors on the Water Environment Association of Utah (WEAU) teams – the Wasatch All Stars and the Central Weber Vortex – always change.

Every year during its annual conference, WEAU holds its Operations Challenge competition. All those who compete can join the Wasatch All Stars team. Generally, after the state competition, a member from each of the teams competing joins the all-star team.

Likewise, new members of Central Weber Vortex are chosen every year. “We try to rotate new members onto the team each year,” said Lance Wood, general manager of the Central Weber Sewer Improvement District (Ogden, Utah). “Our main focus is to provide training opportunities for our operators.”

Wood has seen employees participating in the competition gain more educational training, build new skills, improve teamwork and leadership, and take pride in their profession. This growth cannot be “found or purchased in any better way,” he said.

“I find the peer support among the Operations Challenge teams and team members adds to the knowledge of an operator and makes them a valuable employee,” Wood said.

Get more Operations Challenge 2018 online

Every year Operations Challenge grows in number of teams, reach of the event, and remarkable stories of from its volunteers and competitors. These stories are spread throughout WEF’s printed publications and websites, but all deserve to be shared. Visit this online repository for links to 2018’s stories, photos, and videos, including the following.

- 2018 Operations Challenge Event infographics
- Practice makes perfect for Operations Challenge teams
- Texas Teams Sweep 2018 Operations Challenge
- Operations Challenge Competition Concludes
- In Memoriam: Jim Miller
- International Operations Challenge events unite water sector professionals
- Energizing the KSB Maintenance Event

www.weftec.org/OC2018

OPERATIONS CHALLENGE 2018 OVERALL SCORES

Division 1			
Place	Team	Member Association	Final Score
1	TRA CReWSers	WEA of Texas	466.80
2	OCWA Jets	WEA of Ontario	459.90
3	Elevated Ops	Rocky Mountain WEA	440.29
Division 2			
Place	Team	Member Association	Final Score
1	Pooseidons	WEA of Texas	396.72
2	Waste Warriors	WEA of Texas	388.89
3	Wasatch All Stars	WEA of Utah	381.80

*See the full list of results in *WEF Highlights* at news.wef.org.

Operations Challenge Sponsors

