The Alabama Rural Water Association (ARWA) just completed its 39th Annual Technical Training Conference in Mobile, Alabama from March 12 through March 15, 2017. Many people that attended the conference are responsible for the day to day operations of Alabama’s Public Water Utilities and as such are responsible for the health and safety of their customers. They truly are professionals.

“Professionalism: It’s NOT the job you DO, It’s HOW you DO the job.” — ANONYMOUS

On Wednesday March 15, 2017, to honor those professionals that consistently go above and beyond in utility management and operations, the ARWA hosted the 26th Annual Awards Luncheon.

WATER OPERATOR OF THE YEAR

The Water Operator of the Year is a Grade 3 Certified Water Operator. He began his water career by working for the water utility for a summer job. Over time, he developed a love for this profession. He has continuously shown commitment, ingenuity, and knowledge in the execution of his job.

He is always instituting new ideas or new operational methods in his day to day operations to help the system and build stronger relationships with the customers. This professional works all hours necessary including going to a customer’s house to discuss their concerns when it is most convenient for the customer!

Seven years ago, a fluoride tank ruptured beside the spring which feeds his system. After finding the leak, he spent the next 36 hours working non-stop following regulations regarding notification procedures and flushing of the entire system until the fluoride level returned to normal.

Below is a list of some of his accomplishments:

- He helped direct a 10-Million-Dollar expansion of his Wastewater Treatment Plant to increase efficiency.
- He managed a $500,000-dollar project which replaced lead joint pipe with ductile pipe.
- Provided oversight on a 20,000 linear feet sewer line rehabilitation which included pipe lining and bursting.
- Provided guidance for the replacement of all the ground lift stations with submersibles due to safety concerns.

His colleagues say, “He is an employee that exhibits great motivation, dedication, trustworthiness, talent, and self-discipline. He is an excellent representation of the commitment and dedication required of a water operator.”

Congratulations to Chris Patterson with the Jacksonville Water Works, Gas, and Sewer Board as the 2017 Water Operator of the Year!
WASTEWATER OPERATOR OF THE YEAR

The Wastewater Operator of the Year is a Grade 4 Wastewater Operator and a Grade 4 Water Operator. He has served many wastewater and water systems with his dual certification over his 24-year career!

He never hesitates to do what is necessary to make sure that any situation is handled in the most professional manner. He proudly gives tours to children so that his passion might be passed on to the next generation. Throughout his professional career, he has been involved in every facet of the wastewater industry.

Upon beginning his employment with his current utility, he began installing upgrades that brought new life to the plant and consequently saved the utility millions of dollars that would have been required to build an entirely new plant. He has continued his efforts as he works on additional renovations and improvements to make his treatment plant more efficient and thereby more profitable.

His colleagues say that he always exhibits professionalism, enthusiasm, and has a strong work ethic.

Congratulations to the 2017 Winner of the Wastewater Operator of the Year Award is James Dean with North Baldwin Utilities.

GENERAL MANAGER OF THE YEAR

The General Manager of the Year Award recognizes the individual who exhibits outstanding leadership qualities and accomplishments and who through significant foresight, has made contributions to his or her Water / Wastewater utility in technology, finance, or management.

The winner of this prestigious award has developed and manages an outstanding leadership team. As a result, his field operations staff and office workers are providing exemplary service to the utility’s customers.

Over the past 2 years he has spearheaded the expansion of sewer services for his customers by obtaining grant funding from the Coastal Impact Assistance Program. Through these additional services, residential and business wastewater service customers are becoming a part of a joint effort to improve the environment as septic tanks are removed from the utility’s service area. This area has a high-water table and is consequently sensitive ecologically. It is anticipated that this will have a significant impact for not only improving water quality, but also corresponding recreational activities and marine life.

This Award Winner has a broad and deep understanding of both water and wastewater operations. That understanding has resulted in the improved field infrastructure and equipment as well as to excellence in the financial and budgeting aspects of the organization. With his sound and conservative guidance, the utility’s financial condition is excellent and would be the envy of most rural water and wastewater utilities.

He is an excellent strategic planner, ever mindful of industry and technological developments and the need to position the utility for the future so that it may continue to provide the high quality, low cost service to its 13,500 customers.
OFFICE WORKER OF THE YEAR

As all operators know, the office employees are the front line of our industry. They are the most recognizable and available. They wear many, many hats.

They often feel the need to remind operators and managers alike of what needs to be done and in what order it should be done. The truth is, we would really be somewhat lost if our office workers called in sick for more than a day or two!

PROACTIVE, ENGAGING, AND COMPETENT. Just words unless you are talking about the 2017 Office Worker of the Year. This year’s Office Worker of the Year winner has been with her system since 2001 and currently holds the position of Office Manager. She continues to improve the operation of her utility through upgrading the computer systems, billing programs and radio read meters. She has updated policies and procedures that has streamlined how her office functions. She manages the systems’ financial portfolio and reports to the Board regularly on any changes. She is well liked and respected by her peers and endeavors to treat all the utility customers fairly and honestly. She is open minded and always professional.

In her 16 years of service, she has fulfilled her daily duties and tasks with a quiet yet confident demeanor. She maintains an outstanding rapport with her management, Board, staff and Consultants! 15 months ago, the General Manager of the utility was severely injured and was unavailable to work for approximately six (6) months. This most capable lady stepped into a leadership role. She served as a calming spirit to pull all the employees together to insure the high level of service expected from the utility was maintained. During all of this, the utility was in the middle of a full system water meter replacement and booster station improvements project. The projects never wavered and she saw them to successful completion.

One of her colleagues stated: “This award was established to set apart the ONE Office Worker that exceeds the standard and goes above and beyond what is expected. The ONE that is revered as an irreplaceable member of the water system.”

Congratulations to the 2017 Winner of the Office Worker of the Year Ms. Christy Huff with the Walnut Hill Water Authority.

GENERAL MANAGER OF THE YEAR CONTINUED

He currently is in the planning stages of a $5,000,000 project which will reduce operational costs and bring technological improvements to the utility. Under his guidance, the utility has experienced tremendous growth with extensive water and sewer system expansions and customer services. It has become one of the largest and best-operated water systems in Alabama providing over 7 million gallons of water per day to its customers.

Congratulations to the 2017 Winner of the General Manager of the Year Award, Joe Summersgill, Mobile County Water, Sewer & FPA.
JOHN A. GARRETT OUTSTANDING SERVICE AWARD

The winner of the John A. Garrett Outstanding Service Award, which recognizes an individual who has made significant contributions throughout the State in support of water and wastewater needs, works with the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and served as the Protective Security Advisor for the Montgomery, Alabama District. He contributed to the development of the National risk picture by assisting with the identification, assessment, monitoring, and minimizing of risk to critical assets at the local level.

As a Protective Security Advisor, he supported homeland security efforts across all critical infrastructure sectors by assisting with the identification, assessment and minimizing of risk to critical assets by facilitating, coordinating and conducting vulnerability assessments and training for private sector stakeholders.

During his tenure with the DHS, he provided superb service in support of the Alabama Rural Water Association (ARWA). He participated in the ARWA’s numerous training programs providing training on a host of topics including Active Shooter, Soft Target Awareness, Trends and Tactics and Preventive Measures. He traveled Statewide and occasionally outside of our State to support the training needs of the ARWA providing training presentations during normal duty hours and after duty hours.

Recently, he provided a “Preventive Measures” presentation to Board Members and Facility Operators in Cullman, Anniston and Tuscaloosa. This presentation supported the DHS’s “Homeland Security begins with Hometown Security” initiative.

He is presently serving as an advisor to the Alabama Boys and Girls Club.
Before joining The Department of Homeland Security, he served in the U.S. Air Force for 20 years retiring in 1997 as a Lieutenant Colonel. He also served in State government as a Division Director with the AL Department of Corrections and as an Assistant Director with the Alabama Department of Homeland Security. Michael is planning to retire soon and enjoy more time with family and friends.

Congratulations to the 2017 Winner of the John A. Garrett Outstanding Service Award, Michael Waters, Department of Homeland Security.
4 WHEELER GIVEAWAY

The Awards Ceremony ended with the very popular 4 WHEELER GIVEAWAY ……To be eligible for the 4 wheeler, attendees were preregistered with a paid full registration received by February 24, 2017.

The lucky winner was Thomas Smith with the Mobile County Water, Sewer & FPA.

Special Recognition for Outstanding Service

Special Recognition was given to the Alabama Rural Water Association staff members with 10 years or more outstanding service to the organization. Longevity of employees represents the stability and collaboration of the ARWA.

Congratulations to those who have contributed toward the growth and success of the Association for many years.

Debbie Sillman
Finance Controller
20 years service

Jerena Webb
Office Manager
18 years service

George Marodis
USDA Source Water Specialist
16 years service

Chris Lovelace
Program Specialist
14 years service

Andy Crawford
Circuit Rider
11 years service

Mike Baumgartner
Wastewater Specialist
11 years service