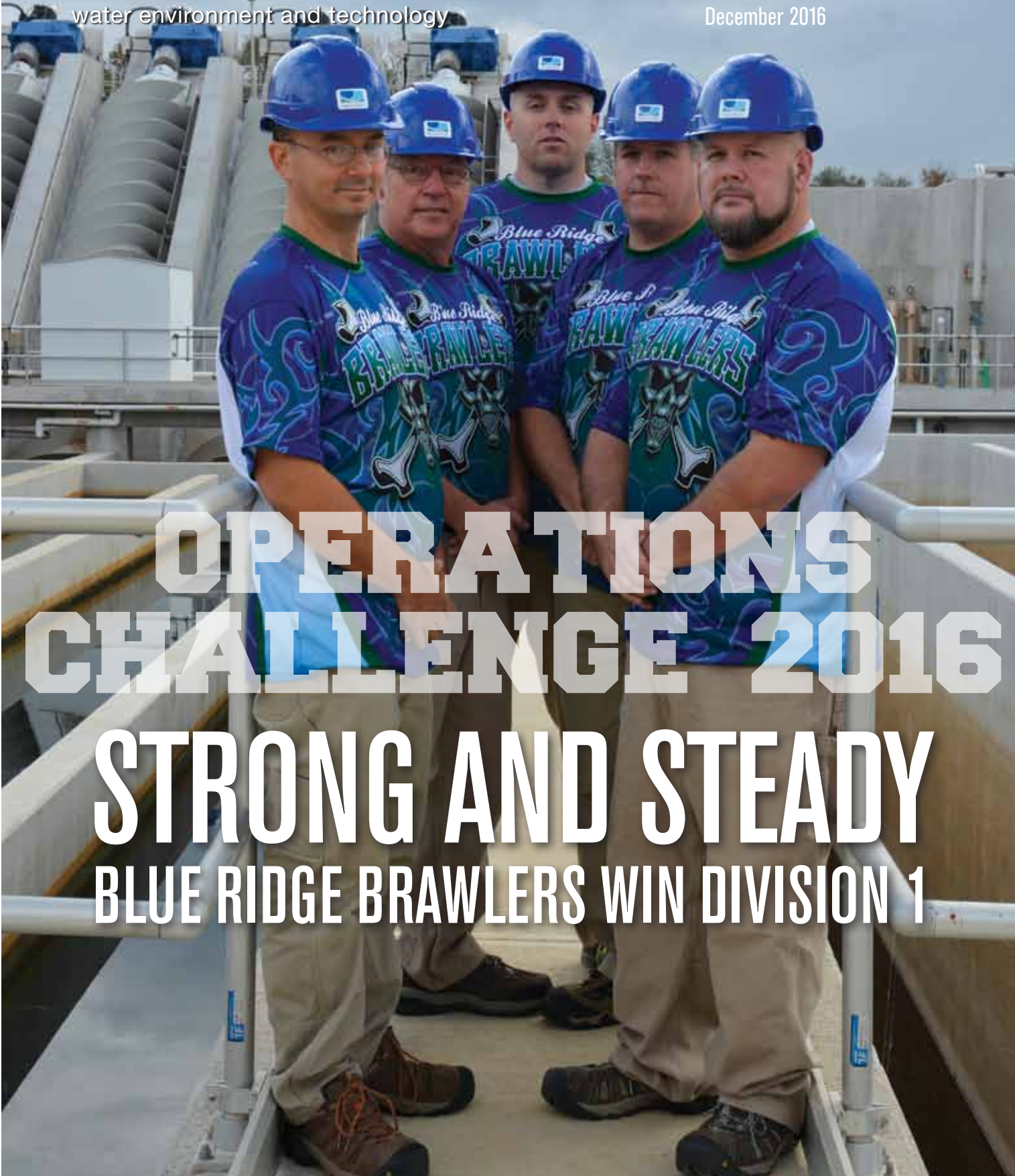


OPERATIONS CHALLENGE 2016

STRONG AND STEADY BLUE RIDGE BRAWLERS WIN DIVISION 1



OPERATIONS CHALLENGE



DIVERSITY ADDS EDGE FOR OPERATIONS CHALLENGE WINNERS

A

s competitors stepped up to the plate at Operations Challenge, each shared a passion for water and a desire to take home first place in their division.

Dedicated professionals, outfitted with hard hats that shined beneath the bright convention center lights, sought to make their team, sponsors, supporters, employers, and Member Association proud.

Their matching uniforms spanned the gamut from simple and sleek to creative and humorous to elaborate and sophisticated. They represented the spectrum of water sector employees. And often, teams attributed success to their differences.

“We feel it is better to have a mix of skill sets and backgrounds, so you can be strong and consistent in all five events,” said Lacy Burnette, captain of the Division 1 overall winners, the Blue Ridge Brawlers.

“It’s important to have a diverse group of participants,” said Kelsey Gedge, captain of the Division 2 winners, Elevated Ops. “We are able to play to each other’s strengths and help lift each other up where, when needed.”

In addition to supreme professionalism, this year that boost also included family ties, international relations, and new career opportunities.

– Jennifer Fulcher with Steve Harrison



Wayne Brown from the Blue Ridge Brawlers competes in the Laboratory Event. Bottom: Tommy Shaver, judge for the event, looks over Elevated Ops team members, Josh Mallorely and Matt Duncan, as they isolate valves during the Safety Event. Kieffer Photography

CHALLENGE 2016



Blue Ridge Brawlers – (from left) Wayne Brown, Kevin Thomasson, captain Lacy Burnette, coach Randy Williams, and Stephen Lofaro – took home numerous Division 1 awards including overall winner, third-place in the Safety Event, second in the Godwin Maintenance Event, and first in the Collection Systems Event. “Because we all work in a different area at the plant, we are all able to bring a different set of skills to the team and we build off of one another,” Burnette said. Kieffer Photography

BLUE RIDGE BRAWLERS MAKE DREAM OF WINNING OPERATIONS CHALLENGE A REALITY

The Blue Ridge Brawlers earned first place overall in Division 1 through hard work, focus, dedication, and a lot of practice, said team captain Lacy Burnette. The Virginia Water Environment Association team practiced once a week since late February. They increased to as many as four practices a week to prepare for the regional competition in New Jersey and then the national Operations Challenge competition at WEFTEC® 2016.

“We knew if we could be strong and consistent and keep the penalties to a minimum that we would be able to keep up with our competition,” Burnette said. “We ramped up the focus and intensity in each practice and that really showed during all of our events this year.”

The team, which also includes Wayne Brown, Stephen Lofaro, Kevin Thomasson, and coach Randy Williams, made their dream of winning the competition a reality.

“Being first place in Division 1 at WEFTEC has been our goal since day one and we knew it would take a lot of hard work to achieve it,” Burnette said. “We really came together as a team this year and it feels good to accomplish our main goal!”

Burnette, captain of the Blue Ridge Brawlers, shows off pipetting skills during the Laboratory Event. Kieffer Photography



OPERATIONS CHALLENGE

PRACTICE MAKES PERFECT FOR MOTLEY POO



Practice made perfect and helped Motley Poo – consisting of Kirk Parks, Wayne Rumbaugh, captain Brad Yeakle, Jim Elliott, alternate Jesse McAllister, and coach Ellen Frketic – earn second overall in Division 1. “The [Maryland Environmental Service] operations staff has to be pretty well-rounded and know all parts of the treatment process,” Frketic said. “I think the Challenge has helped to strengthen their skills.” Kieffer Photography

Motley Poo took second place overall in Division 1. Team captain Brad Yeakle attributes the success to both the team’s dedication to working together and its commitment to finding time to practice.

The practice commitment is even more remarkable considering members work in different facilities in different parts of the state.

Members of the Chesapeake Water Environment Association

team – Yeakle, Wayne Rumbaugh, Jim Elliott, Kirk Parks, alternate Jesse McAllister, and coach Ellen Frketic – worked together to perfect routines and helped each other to become their best in all five events.

“Each [event] has a different strategy, and none of them are easy,” Yeakle said. “We have to be good in all five. If we identified issues on a specific event in practice, then we would spend more time trying to hash out the issue.”

TEAMWORK LEADS TO SUCCESS FOR LA WRECKING CREW



The LA Wrecking Crew, a California Water Environment Association team, placed third in Division 1. The success stems from team members – Will Hoenig, Carlos Vasquez, Nick Janicke, Jesse Cordero, Edwin Ochoa, and coach Dale Dollins – working together, recognizing overall strengths, and working to improve weaknesses, Cordero said.

“Our team is successful because we all actively contribute new ideas, motivate each other, and consistently demonstrate enthusiastic and positive attitude while training for Operations Challenge,” Cordero said. “It takes every team member giving a 100% of their effort in order to be successful.”

Participating in the team reaches beyond WEFTEC®. “We take tremendous pride in the work we do as operators and the service we provide to the community,” Cordero said. “[Operations Challenge] gives us an opportunity to further develop our knowledge and skill set.”

The LA Wrecking Crew competes during the Godwin Maintenance Event. In addition to placing third overall in Division 1, the team also placed first in the Maintenance and the Process Control events. Kieffer Photography

CHALLENGE 2016



Elevated Ops team members, captain Kelsey Gedge, Matt Duncan (pictured left), Lance Wenzholz, Josh Mallorej (pictured right), alternate Rebecca Miller, and coach Orren West, worked together to earn first place in Division 2. “With the Safety Event being new, we had to spend quite a bit of time figuring out the best way to approach the event,” Gedge said. The team also placed first in Process Control. Kieffer Photography

FOCUS ON A CLEAN PERFORMANCE EARNS ELEVATED OPS WIN IN DIVISION 2

Experience and focus on penalty-free runs earned Elevated Ops first-place in Division 2 of Operations Challenge.

The Rocky Mountain Water Environment Association team – captain Kelsey Gedge, Matt Duncan, Lance Wenzholz, Josh Mallorej, alternate Rebecca Miller, and coach Orren West – started practicing in May, dedicating 2 hours twice a week to perfecting their runs on the physical events as well as training at home and taking practice tests together to prepare for the Process Control Event, Gedge said.

“While trying to get faster at each event, we had a greater focus on running the events cleanly,” Gedge said. “We learned a lot from competing last year, and we have already had some discussions about how to tweak a few things once we start back up again next year.”

The team tried to mimic the environment at WEFTEC® 2016, practicing in the same order as their schedule on competition day. The coach even moved around the setup for practice areas, changing the placement of equipment and starting locations for the competitors.

“He tried his best to make us uncomfortable and we tried our best to not let it affect our performance,” Gedge said.



The team used speed, focus, and precision for success. “We were able to play to each others’ strengths and help lift each other up where and when needed,” Gedge said. Team members Duncan, Gedge, and Wenzholz compete in the Godwin Maintenance Event. The team earned second in this event. Kieffer Photography

OPERATIONS CHALLENGE

VARIETY OF SKILLS HELPS WASATCH ALL STARS

WEFTEC® 2016 marked the first event where the Wasatch All Stars competed together. But this didn't hold the team back. The Water Environment Association of Utah team placed second overall in Division 2.

Team members – captain Josh Hunsaker, Scott Brown, Lee Doxey, Dakody Gines, and coach Shawn Vockler – were chosen from four teams, each representing a different facility in Utah. The team members earned their spots on the team and their status as All Stars during Utah's Operations Challenge competition.

Each member brought a different set of skills and had a different set of tasks for each event at the state competition. "We didn't need to relearn too much once practicing started," Vockler said. "Our success at the Ops Challenge this year was our team getting along so well together."



In addition to second overall in Division 2, the Wasatch All Stars – captain Josh Hunsaker, Scott Brown, Lee Doxey, Dakody Gines, and coach Shawn Vockler – earned first in the Safety Event and third in the Godwin Maintenance Event. Kieffer Photography

TRA WASTE WARRIORS FOCUS ON TEAMWORK AND INDIVIDUAL DEDICATION



The TRA Waste Warriors credit their third-place win in Division 2 to preparation both individually and as a team with a focus on events and tasks that were identified as weaknesses.

The Water Environment Association of Texas (WEAT) team included captain Clifford Wood, Howard Williams, Zachary Jackson, Quintin Winters, and coach Andrew Moore.

"Everyone prepares for their roles prior to practice, reading and understanding the rules of each event, reviewing old videos, and discussing potential changes based on input from the event coordinators," Moore said.

The team focused on preparing one of its most challenging events, Process Control. "Each person was assigned a specific area and committed to learn everything they could about that topic," Moore said, "That person was then required to teach the other team members about that topic... The time, work, and individual dedication we placed toward improvement for this event resulted in an overall third place finish; the payoff was worth the effort."

In Division 2, the TRA Waste Warriors team members captain Clifford Wood, Howard Williams (pictured), Zachary Jackson, Quintin Winters, and coach Andrew Moore united to earn third place both overall and in the Safety Event as well as second place in the Collection Systems Event. "This year they have definitely really, really shined," said Dale Burrow, captain of the TRA CREWSers. "They're a good group of guys, they deserve it." Kieffer Photography

CHALLENGE 2016

FATHER-SON DUO DEDICATED TO OPERATIONS CHALLENGE



The Sober family father (Gary) and son (Jeff) share a commitment to the water sector and operators. Jeff earned the 2014 Water Environment Federation (WEF; Alexandria, Va.) Young Water Professional award and Gary has been a member of WEF for 35 years. "It's a lot of fun ... Pops and I getting to work together all the time," said Jeff Sober. Heather Wootton, Garver (Little Rock, Ark)

While Operations Challenge is often referred to as a big extended family, Gary and Jeff Sober made that a little more literal this year. The father and son team worked on the Operations Challenge sidelines to make sure the competition ran smoothly at WEFTEC® 2016.

Gary, a Water Environment Federation (WEF; Alexandria, Va.) life member, worked as an assistant coordinator for the Laboratory Event. Jeff served as the coordinator for the Collection Systems Event.

JOINING THE OPERATIONS BROTHERHOOD

Gary first joined WEF in 1981. While working on his company's project at the University of Texas (Austin), a professor recommended that Gary join WEF and the Water Environment Association of Texas (WEAT), so he did.

Gary has seen WEF and WEAT become "more operator friendly" and increase the opportunities for networking, he said. In addition to being an assistant coordinator at the national competition, he also coordinates the Process Control and Laboratory events for the Operations Challenge competition at the WEAT conference.

"Operators basically have a brotherhood and it's really neat once you get into that world," Gary said.

LEGACY OF OPERATIONS PASSED ALONG TO THE NEXT GENERATION

Gary remembers taking his son to watch Operations Challenge about 25 years ago when WEFTEC was held in Dallas.

"Growing up watching my dad in operations, it was just something I wanted to be a part of," Jeff said.

Jeff joined WEF and WEAT in 2006 and quickly became involved in Operations Challenge at both at the state and national

levels. "I just thought it was a really cool program that helped advance the career and profession of operators," Jeff said.

He started as a judge and now is a coordinator at both state and national levels.

"Judging and coordinating is a pretty good time commitment leading up to WEFTEC," Jeff said.

Coordinators help plan the event, coordinate judges, communicate changes, assist at regional competitions, disseminate information to teams and judges, and ensure equipment has been procured and set up correctly. They spend nearly all of their time at WEFTEC focused on Operations Challenge.

OPERATIONS CHALLENGE FAMILY MAKES VOLUNTEERING WORTHWHILE

"The Operations Challenge program is just filled with a lot of really great people ... it's just a family," Jeff said. "Being a part of that family is what keeps you doing it regardless of the commitment."

"Most of the people you see here ... have a great passion for this industry and the majority of them want to give back. They want to see the system and the people who enter it grow and get better," Gary said.

Gary is proud of his son and enjoys sharing the passion for the profession and competition. "It's fulfilling to look across there and see him," Gary said.

Read the *WEF Highlights* article, "My Water Legacy: Like Father, Like Son," for more about the Sobers.

OPERATIONS CHALLENGE

DIVERSE OHIO TEAM MAKES DREAM OF COMPETING A REALITY



Minimal Headloss team members, Jimmy Spencer, Douglas Dietzel, Christen Wood, and Dan Valek compete in the Safety Event. The Northeast Ohio Regional Sewer District (Cleveland) management supports the new team. The district's previous team competed about 25 years ago. "Participation in the team was a stepping stone into later management positions" said John Corn, training and development manager at the district. Kieffer Photography

From the first moment she saw Operations Challenge, Christen Wood wanted to be on a team. Her dream came true at WEFTEC® 2016 when the new Ohio Water Environment Association team, Minimal Headloss, competed.

"I have always wanted to do Ops Challenge," Wood said. "This has always been a dream to be here."

She approached the management team at the Northeast Ohio Regional Sewer District (Cleveland) and asked to form a team. After getting approval, Wood set to recruiting members.

NEW TEAM SHOWCASES RANGE OF TALENTS

"Our group is very methodically put together to include as many sectors of what we do as possible," Wood said. "I wanted to make sure the team was integrated enough that anybody could compete."

The team includes

- Wood who has 4 years of experience in the laboratory, 4 years in operations, and 1 year in management;
- Jimmy Spencer who has more than 20 years' experience in electronics in the military and 2 years' experience in wastewater;
- Douglas Dietzel who has worked 4 years as a wastewater analyst and chemist in the laboratory;
- Dan Valek who has 26 years of maintenance experience with 13 years working on wastewater equipment; and
- coach Karl Ellis who has more than 35 years in wastewater operations and process management.

"We all come from very different backgrounds. We're at different levels within our organization," Wood said. "It's just been really nice to have a diverse team like we do."

CHALLENGE 2016



Top left: Dan Valek competes in the Laboratory Event.

Top right: During WEFTEC® 2016, Minimal Headloss team captain Christen Wood (@Sewer_chic) received a new Professional Operator recognition by the Association of Boards of Certification (ABC; Ankeny, Iowa) from WEF House of Delegates member Lonni Rasmussen (left) and Chair of the ABC 2016 Board of Directors Mike Gosselin (right). Oscar & Associates

Bottom left: Douglas Dietzel helps the team complete the Process Control Event. Kieffer Photography

practiced with the other Ohio teams and competed at their state competition to prepare for the national competition. Minimal Headloss used feedback from other teams and judges to improve. "Everybody is constantly getting better, I love that about my team," Wood said.

COMPETITION TRAINING TRANSLATES TO THE JOB

The results of training already have shown benefits back at the job. Spencer calibrates a bisulfite meter every week at his facility. "His calibrations take a third less time now because he's developed his skills in the laboratory section," Wood said. "It's been a great crossover training."

Before Wood approached management, the district had been planning to form an Operations Challenge team in the future.

"I think iron sharpens iron," said John Corn, training and development manager at the district. "When folks have an opportunity to compete against one another, that gives them a chance to enhance process across the board."

The district consists of three large facilities. Corn hopes to use Operations Challenge as a tool to train and develop employees and increase communication and cooperation among the facilities.

"It develops a cross-pollination of best practices across our plants," Corn said. "We really want to leverage this process as much as possible."

DIVERSITY LEADS TO CROSS-TRAINING

Because of their various experiences, assigning the the most technical tasks in each event to the team member with the most real-world experience in that area became simple, Wood said. Those more experienced in certain areas help train the others.

The team also worked together to redistribute tasks during each event because while at WEFTEC, Wood was 7 months pregnant. Wood was cleared by her doctor to participate but did avoid such physical tasks as going down the manhole in the Safety Event. "They've been incredibly supportive," Wood said.

In addition to regular practice sessions, the team also

OPERATIONS CHALLENGE TEAM BECOMES EXTENSION OF APPRENTICESHIP PROGRAM



Team HRSD not only competes at Operations Challenge competitions, the team conducts demonstrations to educate the local community and inspire a future generation to pursue clean water careers. The team's speed on the Maintenance Event thrills those attending the Virginia Science Technology, Engineering and Applied Mathematics (STEAM) Academy Inc. (Suffolk, Va.) Summer STEAM held this summer at Old Dominion University (Norfolk, Va.). HRSD

Since 1979, the Hampton Roads Sanitation District (HRSD; Virginia Beach, Va.) has had a 4-year apprenticeship program that combines on-the-job training with classroom instruction. But recently, Operations Challenge officially connected with the program.

Initially the connection was a coincidence. Several new employees replaced retiring Operations Challenge competitors, said Tim Scott, lead operator at HRSD and coach of Team HRSD. But with new employees starting every week, HRSD recognized an opportunity.

MAKING ROOM FOR THE NEWCOMERS

"We soon recognized the need to energize this new pool of employees to create the next generation of wastewater professionals," Scott said. "The Challenge gives us a platform in which to instill the importance of what they do, and create a passion for excellence that will benefit the employee and the organization for years to come."

HRSD now limits Operations Challenge tenure to a 4-year competitive term and encourages apprentices to participate. At WEFTEC® 2016, Team HRSD included two operator apprentices in Year 3 of the HRSD program, a maintenance apprentice in Year 1, and an interceptor technician who is a student.

The competition gives apprentices hands-on experience. "Aspects that can be taught in a classroom get applied in real-life situations," Scott said. "The competitors get exposed to many areas of treatment and maintenance that they may not typically see at their facility. [Operations Challenge] gives them a much broader understanding and knowledge that they can draw from in the future."

COMPETING PAVES THE WAY TO A BRIGHT FUTURE

Out of 38 previous Team HRSD competitors, 30 have been promoted within the organization, and 35 have worked for HRSD for 10 years or more, Scott said. "It is an investment in our people that has paid off by being one of the factors that has allowed us to retain talented employees for the long-term."

Scott also believes that Operations Challenge expedites the learning process.

"In just a few years of training for the competition and networking with other teams and judges, I have taken away a career's worth of experience and knowledge," he said.

CHALLENGE 2016

ARGENTINA TEAM RECEIVES WARM WELCOME

A team of eager wastewater professionals from Argentina formed the Operations Challenge team, TNT. Every 2 years, the Interamerican Sanitary and Environmental Engineering Association (Buenos Aires, Argentina), hosts a local Operations Challenge competition and sends the winning team to compete at WEFTEC®.

This year's team – captain Rodrigo Marcer, Ruben Cordoba, Gabriel Devita, Hugo Velez, and coach Jose Bustamante – began working together 3 weeks before the Argentina competition held May 30. The team spent 8-hour sessions every week practicing and earned their way to WEFTEC.

SPECIAL PRACTICE SESSION HELPS PREPARE TEAM

TNT repeated their training regimen before coming to New Orleans, but they were not able to acquire the same equipment used at WEFTEC, particularly the equipment used in the Safety Event, Bustamante said.



The Interamerican Sanitary and Environmental Engineering Association (Buenos Aires, Argentina) team TNT focused on preparing for the Safety Event during a special practice session hosted by the Louisiana Water Environment Association team, the Water Dawgs. Kieffer Photography



Team TNT – captain Rodrigo Marcer, Ruben Cordoba, Gabriel Devita, Hugo Velez, and coach Jose Bustamante – spent 8-hour sessions every week practicing. They won the Spirit Award for Best Effort. Kieffer Photography

To help the Argentina team prepare, the Louisiana Water Environment Association team, the Water Dawgs, invited TNT to practice at the New Orleans Sewerage and Water Board facility. During the 6-hour practice session on Sept. 24, the Water Dawgs – captain Carlton Allen, Mark Bear Child, Phillip Miner, Jaryan Youngblood, and coach Jerome Marshall – volunteered their time to make sure TNT had hands-on training for the events.

“The Argentina team is a very nice team,” Marshall said. “It bridges the gap ... to get together from across the sea, across the globe.” The Water Dawgs also treated TNT members to a lunch filled with local fare. “They’re welcome anytime,” Marshall said.

The best part about Operations Challenge is how well the team was received, the “warmth of the people,” and kindness shown by everyone involved, Bustamante said.

TNT won the 2016 Operations Challenge Spirit Award for Best Effort.



Jerome Marshall (center), coach of the Water Dawgs, received an Honorary Operator Ingenuity Award from Sewerage and Water Board of New Orleans Executive Director Cedric Grant (pictured left) and Deborah Houdeshell (pictured right), past member of the WEF Board of Trustees and senior project manager at ms consultants inc. (Columbus, Ohio) during WEFTEC® 2016. Oscar & Associates



OVERALL SCORES

Division 1			
Place	Team	Member Association	Final Score
1	Blue Ridge Brawlers	Virginia WEA	443.64
2	Motley Poo	Chesapeake WEA	441.24
3	LA Wrecking Crew	California WEA	424.56
Division 2			
Place	Team	Member Association	Final Score
1	Elevated Ops	Rocky Mountain WEA	427.81
2	Wasatch All-Stars	WEA of Utah	408.90
3	TRA Waste Warriors	WEA of Texas	395.74

LABORATORY EVENT

Division 1		
Place	Team	Member Association
1	Motley Poo	Chesapeake WEA
2	TRA CReWSers	WEA of Texas
3	ReWa Blackwater Bruisers	WEA of South Carolina
Division 2		
Place	Team	Member Association
1	Team HRSD	Virginia WEA
2	NWSSD Dirty Deeds	Ohio WEA
3	Shovelers	Central States WEA

SAFETY EVENT

Division 1		
Place	Team	Member Association
1	ReWa Blackwater Bruisers	WEA of South Carolina
2	Motley Poo	Chesapeake WEA
3	Blue Ridge Brawlers	Virginia WEA
Division 2		
Place	Team	Member Association
1	Wasatch All-Stars	WEA of Utah
2	Royal Flush	WEA of Utah
3	TRA Waste Warriors	WEA of Texas

GODWIN MAINTENANCE EVENT

Division 1		
Place	Team	Member Association
1	LA Wrecking Crew	California WEA
2	Blue Ridge Brawlers	Virginia WEA
3	OCWA Jets	WEA of Ontario
Division 2		
Place	Team	Member Association
1	Aqua Techs	WEA of Texas
2	Elevated Ops	Rocky Mountain WEA
3	Wasatch All-Stars	WEA of Utah

PROCESS CONTROL EVENT

Division 1		
Place	Team	Member Association
1	LA Wrecking Crew	California WEA
2	TRA CRWSers	WEA of Texas
3	Motley Poo	Chesapeake WEA
Division 2		
Place	Team	Member Association
1	Elevated Ops	Rocky Mountain WEA
2	Shovelers	Central States WEA
3	Seacoast Sewer Snakes	New England WEA

COLLECTION SYSTEMS EVENT

Division 1		
Place	Team	Member Association
1	Blue Ridge Brawlers	Virginia WEA
2	LA Wrecking Crew	California WEA
3	Motley Poo	Chesapeake WEA
Division 2		
Place	Team	Member Association
1	Aqua Techs	WEA of Texas
2	TRA Waste Warriors	WEA of Texas
3	Royal Flush	WEA of Utah

SPIRIT AWARDS

Award	Team	Member Association
Best Overall Uniform	Wastewater Wranglers	Indiana WEA
Best Hard Hat Design	Team HRSD	Virginia WEA
Most Creative Team Photo	OCWA Jets	WEA of Ontario
Team Congeniality	Sewercide Warriors	Hawaii WEA
Best Fan Support	Shovelers	Central States WEA
Best Effort	TNT	AIDIS AySA

See the winners and other competitors in a WEF Highlights Operations Challenge gallery at goo.gl/acnOm6.