

2015 Water Reuse Symposium

Rob McCandless, Symposium Committee Chair

As I write this summary, sheltered from the sweltering dog days of August in Tempe, I long for the shade of the pines and cool nights again. This year's Water Reuse Symposium was held in Flagstaff on July 26 through 28. It was an event worth remembering not just for the great weather, but for a fantastic program and the energy provided by all of the attendees and speakers.

We thought we needed something different this year to kick off the symposium. With all of our research and technology, we still face perceptions of reclaimed water and its 'yuck factor' and we reinforce this identity by using purple pipe, purple fixtures, and purple signs. So, why not confront those perceptions head on with fun and laughter? Thus the Purple Water Balloon Battle was born! Two teams, those supporting Arizona State University (aka Tempe Normal) and the University of Arizona, located in Baja Arizona, squared off each with a tub full of purple water balloons. The ammunition was supplied by NAU supporters (aka Switzerland). As the melee ensued, not one person escaped a good drenching. The Maroon and Gold were grossly outnumbered but fought valiantly and none more so than Bob Hollander. I can't speak for all, but I can say that in the heat of battle, I gave no thought to the origin of that water, and that was exactly the point!

Monday's General Session began with an introduction by WaterReuse Arizona Section President Brian Biesemeyer and AZ Water Association President Tom Galeziewski. Flagstaff Public Utilities Director Brad Hill and Flagstaff Mayor Jerry Nabours gave a warm welcome and shared a glimpse of Flagstaff's experience in the reclaimed water realm. Melissa Meeker, Executive Director of the WaterReuse Association provided a keynote address that highlighted the importance of gaining the public's trust that reuse, and particularly potable reuse, is safe and a means to extending our water supplies. U.S. Representative Paul Gosar, representing Arizona's District 4, demonstrated his grasp on Arizona's water issues and gave an update of bipartisan legislative work done to provide funding for water resource projects in Arizona. I must say it was encouraging to hear the cooperation between Republican and Democrat congressmen to help our state.

We ran two tracks of talks through the remainder of Monday and Tuesday morning for a total of 24 presentations on topics ranging from Public Outreach to Industrial Water Reuse, to the experience of smaller communities and of course, Potable Reuse. We also heard from other noteworthy reuse programs from El Paso, Texas and San Diego's Pure Water Program.

Tuesday saw the close of the symposium with another General Session that included an update on from the Steering Committee for Arizona's Potable Reuse (SCAPR) by Tim Thomure, ADEQ Water Quality Division Director Trevor Baggione, and ADWR Director Thomas Buschatzke. Ginger Bryant of Bryant and Associates gave an overview of the Reclamation Efficiency Act of 2015 which is intended to provide funding for reuse and water resource projects in drought stricken western states. Sarah Porter, Director of the Kyl Center for Water Policy, closed the session with a key note address that reminded us that Arizona is a leader in water reuse and is in a good position with respect to water resources even during the current drought condition, yet the work continues.

I heard from many attendees who enjoyed the symposium and the program we put together. It would not have been such a success without the planning committee, sponsors, and Lisa Culbert (WateReuse Arizona Executive Administrator and AZWater Board member). We're excited about the positive feedback we received and have been in discussion over holding this symposium annually.

And next year, the maroon and gold will have their day!