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Wisconsin Chapter
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Leadership & Management Committee

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Wisconsin Emerging Leader Program: APWA – PWX 2016 Report

“5...4...3...2...1...” I slowly said to myself before I launched myself out of bed on the Thursday morning following APWA’s first PWX Conference in Minneapolis, Minnesota. Thanks to Tuesday’s keynote speaker, Mel Robbins, I have found a new approach to tackling items I thought were impossible by counting backwards from five and not giving my brain time to talk me out of the decision; which, after four days of learning and engaging with Public Works employees and vendors, my impossible task was trying to get out of bed on Thursday morning. This was only one of the infinite tactics and lessons I learned while attending an exhilarating and inspiring American Public Works Association’s PWX Conference.

My PWX experience kicked off with some delicious food and an informative meeting for us “first-timers” at the national conference. This meeting gave me the boost of confidence I needed to tackle my first conference as the Diversity Committee explained how to best utilize the PWX App, navigate the massive exhibitor hall, and how to get the most out of this conference.

From the first-timers meeting I learned about Seattle’s bike lane system, where they are implementing new bike lanes to encourage commuting via bicycle while reducing the number of bike fatalities. Then it was onto the first keynote speaker: U.S. Astronaut and retired U.S. Navy Captain, Scott Kelly. Captain Kelly gave a captivating speech as he told his story of living in space for one year and described the dedication it took to complete his year in space; the same dedication he encourages us to use as we set goals for our own profession. As Kelly stated “the sky is *not* the limit.”

Now that I was all “pumped up” from this keynote speaker I took my energy to the exhibit hall where I was able to discover new technology, explore entrancing products, sit in heavy equipment, and collect more free pens than I thought imaginable. After a few more sessions that included topics such as 3D modeling of utilities and the use of permeable pavers on roads in the Midwest, I was able to board the bus to Target Field where an evening of socializing with fellow public work employees awaited me.

PWX began Monday morning with stomach pains from laughing so much during the keynote speaker, Jeff Havens’, *Uncrapify Your Life*. Havens gave a satirical speech on how to use communication to create relationships in the workplace. I, like many others, were so inspired by his speech that we quickly

purchased his newest book *Us vs. Them* where during the book signing I learned he is also a Green Bay Packer fan! Needless to say, Havens was my favorite speaker of the conference.

Next I was on to a more serious presentation by the National Emerging Leaders Academy class of 2015-2016 titled "Preparing the Next Generation of Public Works – Equipping Leaders with Tools to Engage Your Staff and Harness the Power of Community." This group of sixteen put together a phenomenal presentation on onboarding, professional development, recognition, and outreach for the next generation of employees. After the presentation a business card was handed out with the link to their website where a toolbox of checklists, spreadsheets, and other onboarding tools were located. These tools appear to be very user-friendly and valuable to all Public Work professions while working with the newest generation coming into the workplace.

Monday afternoon included a presentation on risk assessment and management where the speaker encouraged all engineers to first go out to the field and evaluate a site prior to beginning any design work. Following this, I was able to attend a presentation on funding, something I knew very little about. The two presenters gave a great overview on taxes and how to fund projects in the future through either your organization, your community, or federal funding. While I do not directly deal with funding, this information is instrumental when discussing future projects and to build upon for future advancement. The day wrapped up with a discussion by three very successful women in Public Works on overcoming the challenges to bring more women into the trades. When only three percent of the workforce in Public Works is women, it is a topic that cannot be ignored; through new recruiting tactics and training plans, these women presented a great way we can close the ratio of men to women in Public Works.

Mel Robbins kicked off Tuesday morning as our keynote speaker as she described her theory on the "five second rule." As I stated earlier, she introduced the revelation that you need to act within five seconds to stop your brain from talking yourself out of carrying out said task. I put this tactic right to work in my next session, the Diversity Brunch, where I sat down and introduced myself to a table of people instead of talking myself out of it and going to sit at the empty table. The Diversity Brunch was exceptional! Vicki LaRose, CEO of Civil Design, Inc., gave a great dialogue on how she built a successful, diverse company that started in the basement of her home.

After some time spent in the exhibit hall, I made my way to a presentation on California's pilot project regarding paying by the mile; a very interesting yet controversial way to attain funding for infrastructure projects by using a Fitbit type device for your car to track your driving patterns and distances. Next I attended a presentation on recruiting and retaining young employees in the Public Works sector. The cities presenting have found successful ways to recruit young professional through competitive salaries and rotational programs, and have learned to retain them through mentorship and higher education funding programs. I concluded my day of learning at a Happy Hour Jam session about becoming engaged in APWA. The roundtable discussion had others explain how they became involved in the national committees, the board of directors, all the way up to the president of APWA.

The highlight of the day was the Wisconsin Chapter Dinner at Hell's Kitchen. Here I was able to meet professionals from Wisconsin, swap notes on the conference, discuss local events in Wisconsin, share a few laughs, enjoy a drink and eat a delicious meal! It was so great to see how excited everyone was about what was being discussed at PWX and how this information could be brought back and specifically implemented into their various offices in Wisconsin.

Wednesday included several workshop options to attend in the morning. I had the opportunity to attend one on innovations in pedestrian safety. After listening to new tactics to decrease the number of pedestrian accidents, we were able to walk out to an intersection, where a pedestrian had recently been hit, to perform a study on how to make that crosswalk safer to pedestrians. Upon conclusion of the workshops, PWX came to a close with a final speaker on Strong Towns by Charles Marohn, who believes that for a city to grow we must fix what is existing prior to expanding or building new. This was an impactful speech and a great way to conclude the conference.

PWX was an invaluable experience. I have returned to the City of Green Bay with new ideas, tons of enthusiasm, new contacts, a fancy APWA shirt, a few water bottles, plenty of pens, and, most importantly, pride for the work we all do in Public Works. I am excited to use what information I gained to become a leader in the City of Green Bay and in APWA, both locally and nationally. While I have not been back in the office long since attending the conference, I have already volunteered at the Winter Maintenance Supervisor Certificate Training and helped encourage the City of Green Bay to apply to host the Wisconsin APWA Spring 2019 Conference! Thank you to the APWA – Wisconsin Chapter for selecting me to participate in your Emerging Leader Program, it was an incredible opportunity and I hope you can feel the excitement I obtained through this experience.