



# CITY OF JANESVILLE

*Wisconsin's Park Place*

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September 5, 2017

Subject: 2017 APWA PWX Orlando, FL Experience

Dear Members of the Executive Committee:

It is an honor and a privilege to participate in the Wisconsin Emerging Public Works Leaders Program, and I greatly appreciate the opportunity to travel to the beautiful City of Orlando, FL for the 2017 APWA PWX. I had a great experience at the Expo over the past several days, and I returned home with a renewed energy and enthusiasm toward my career in public works and a desire to become very active in the APWA Wisconsin Chapter in the future. My PWX experience is outlined in this letter, and I hope that it portrays the enthusiasm and inspiration that I have gained as a result of my attendance.

### *First Timers Meeting*

As a “newbie” at PWX, I was invited to attend the First Timers meeting & breakfast on Sunday morning. At the meeting, the past APWA President, Ron Calkins, and Diversity Committee members provided insight on getting the most out of the PWX experience. To help us reduce anxiety about engaging new people, we performed an exercise to introduce ourselves to others in the room. There were APWA members from all over the world in attendance, and I was able to meet folks from Australia and Canada during the exercise in addition to several people from all over the United States. We also were advised to keep an open mind when scheduling educational sessions, to take advantage of the myriad of vendors on the exhibit floor, how to utilize the APWA Events App to enhance the PWX experience, and to enjoy the amenities and attractions that Orlando offers.

### *General Sessions*

The Opening General session on Sunday was a great kick-off to the conference. The pre-show entertainment was amazing! Thom Singer was the perfect keynote speaker and conference emcee. He was funny, engaging, and provided excellent insight about the importance of human engagement and opportunity. The phrase, “Choose people,” resonated with me. The importance of building and maintaining real relationships is often overlooked, and people often lose or miss out on personal connections with friends, family, and business associates due to an infatuation of being connected via social media. I find myself guilty of focusing on my phone at times, and I have committed myself to going “offline” more often and engaging with people directly when I have the opportunity.

The General Sessions on Monday and Tuesday were informative and engaging. On Monday, Lisa Monaco, a former US Homeland Security and Counterterrorism Advisor to the President, gave an intriguing presentation that focused on cyber terrorism and the potential



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impact that it has on public works services and infrastructure. I was shocked at the potential for disasters that may result from simply clicking on a link in an email, and I have a new respect for the IT staff in my organization and their efforts! The presenter on Tuesday, Bob Allen, shared a new perspective on how we may develop our story-telling abilities to promote and advance public works. I had never considered the power of story-telling as a leadership skill.

The Closing Session was by far my favorite general session throughout the entire conference. The keynote speaker, Derreck Kayongo, was absolutely amazing and full of energy! His personal story of survival, success in the face of adversity, and passion for humanity brought tears to my eyes during his presentation. Mr. Kayongo's message was very clear and will stick in my mind forever – Do not leave this world without making a difference, no matter how difficult the road may be. After the powerful presentation was finished, we learned the lyrics to and sang an African song. I cannot imagine a better way to have concluded PWX!

## *Educational Sessions*

The Educational Sessions offered at PWX were excellent and provided useful information and ideas, many of which I will use or expand upon in my own organization. It was difficult to decide which sessions to attend, and I often found myself having to choose between multiple sessions offered at the same time. For the past few years, I have been working diligently with other team members in my division to influence and change the culture of the workplace to become more positive. PWX provided an excellent opportunity for me to educate myself on what other agencies are doing to improve their organization. I opted to attend multiple educational sessions at PWX that revolved around employee morale, implementing change, hiring and retaining good employees, and becoming a more effective leader.

One of the sessions, "Now We Are Here: How Arapahoe County's Public Works Improved Its Organization One Employee at a Time," presented by Arapahoe County Public Works (CO) staff, was particularly inspiring. The presenters shared their experience in revamping the complacent and negative culture within their organization. They provided a few great ideas that I plan on implementing in the City of Janesville Operations Division, including the use of social media to keep our community and staff more connected to the daily activities that are performed across the City.

Another session, "Incite Your Community to Love Public Works," also inspired me to look at innovative ways to promote public works. The City of North Port, FL holds an annual "Road-E-O" where members of the community are invited to the public works facility to experience a fun, rodeo-themed carnival. Residents are invited to view and sit in the seat of equipment and participate in fun games in which prizes are available. The facility is open for the public to view, projects and daily work activities are put on exhibit, and local food vendors are invited to provide food. As a result, city residents are exposed to and educated about public works. The



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interaction and positive feedback from the citizens improves the moral of the public works staff as they see firsthand the appreciation of their hard work. I believe that community outreach is very important in the public works field and the City of North Port created an exciting way to engage and educate their community.

I am very happy that I was able to attend “A View From the Top – Women in Public Works Talk About Their Lives & Careers.” As a female in public works, it was empowering to hear other women from all levels of their career share their experiences and give advice. Emma Browne, an engineer with the City of Green Bay, spoke about finding herself as the only female engineer in the first company that she worked for upon completing college. I had a very similar experience when I accepted my first position with an engineering firm in the private sector after college. It was very liberating to know that there are others out there that I may reach out to. I was very shocked and pleased to see men in attendance at the session, as well!

## *Exposition Hall*

I managed to navigate my way through the entire exposition hall over the three days that it was open. I was familiar with a few of the vendors, but there were several others that I was unaware of that offered equipment and services that I was interested in learning about. I carried a backpack throughout the conference, and I all but filled it up with the brochures and business cards that I picked up on the exhibit floor. The Daily Prize Drawings were a great touch and very fun! Although I didn't win any of the gift card prizes, I thoroughly enjoyed watching others' enthusiasm as their names were called!

I spent a great deal of time talking to representatives about GIS-integrated asset management systems. One of the largest struggles that I have found in my organization is the lack of a good way to track and schedule work and services. I have been lobbying for a work order system, and the exposure that I had to the various companies that offer this type of solution was wonderful. I will be making several follow-up calls and sending various emails requesting additional information in the next few weeks.

## *Social Events*

One of the most enjoyable aspects of PWX was the opportunity to network with so many professionals in public works. The Get Acquainted Party at the Rosen Centre Hotel provided an excellent “ice breaker” for me to begin introducing myself to others. The food, music, and overall atmosphere of the event was wonderful. I ran into Ike Dolan, the other WI Chapter Emerging Public Works Leaders Program participant, without even realizing who he was!

The Young Professionals Networking Reception was a great way for me to meet other young professionals. BB King's Blues Club was a very fun and upbeat, albeit very LOUD,



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venue for the reception. The atmosphere was casual, and the live music was excellent. Afterwards, I was invited by some newly acquired acquaintances to continue exploring the Orlando night life. We continued to meet other PWX attendees from all over the US and Canada. On Tuesday morning, I awoke to approximately 15-20 new business cards in my wallet and no voice!

## *WI Chapter Dinner*

The Wisconsin Chapter Dinner which was held at Mango's and provided a great opportunity for me to meet some fellow members of the APWA WI Chapter. The appetizers were so delicious that I barely had room for my entrée. Unfortunately, I had to pass up on dessert altogether! The entertainment was very good, and I particularly enjoyed the Michael Jackson performance. My only regret is that the restaurant entertainment was so loud that it was difficult to have in depth conversation with other attendees or for the Chapter to have a formal meeting. I am looking forward to the fall conference in Wausau to continue to meet Chapter members.

The 2017 APWA PWX was an unforgettable experience. I am truly grateful to have had the opportunity to attend, and I hope that I will be able to attend future PWX Expos. Having returned to the City of Janesville, I am looking forward to utilizing the tools and knowledge that I have gained at the conference within my organization. I have several follow up emails and calls to make, and I look forward to building upon the new relationships that I have gained. My first impression of the APWA is that it is more like an extended family than a nationwide, professional association. The members are deeply committed to public service and their communities, and I am very excited to become involved in our Chapter in the upcoming months and beyond! I would once again like to extend my gratitude to the APWA WI Chapter for selecting me as a participant in the Emerging Public Works Leaders Program and providing me with this amazing experience.

Sincerely,

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