



Metropolitan Water Reclamation District of Greater Chicago

# Press Release

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## MWRD participates in 89th annual WEFTEC conference to exchange, expand knowledge



*MWRD staff members and Sewer Rat team members included (L to R): Matt Jurjovec, Josh Filler, John Conry, Sandra Matual, John Malinowski and Ed Staudacher who competed in the Operations Challenge at the Water Environment Federation Technical Exhibition and Conference in New Orleans.*

Staff and Commissioners of the Metropolitan Water Reclamation District of Greater Chicago (MWRD) traveled to New Orleans last month to participate in the Water Environment Federation Technical Exhibition and Conference (WEFTEC) to address the current and future needs of modern water utilities.

The 89th annual WEFTEC held at the New Orleans Morial Convention Center presented an opportunity for representatives from more than 1,000 water companies and agencies to address best practices, technology and transformative innovation at the world's largest annual water quality conference. More than 20,000 water professionals were expected to attend the conference that included traditional presentations, panel sessions, knowledge development forums, mobile sessions, hands-on workshops, Interactive Knowledge Exchange (IKE) sessions and numerous events designed to create unique learning experiences.

"As a host city to WEFTEC every other year, we are proud to attend and share our experiences in water treatment, resource recovery and energy efficiency," said MWRD Vice President Barbara McGowan. "As much as we have to gain by learning about international success stories in water management, we have many skills and knowledge to exhibit that can impact others across the world to improve the planet's water environment."



*(L to R): Junli Bai, Kuldip Kumar and Paul O'Brien at WEFTEC.*

The MWRD received two awards at WEFTEC, including recognition as a "Utility of the Future Today." This new distinction was bestowed to the MWRD after an extensive application process that was reviewed by a selection committee which consisted of peer utility leaders from the National Association of Clean Water Agencies (NACWA), the Water Environment & Reuse Foundation (WE&RF), the Water Environment Federation (WEF) and the WaterReuse Association.

"We are excited to receive the recognition as a Utility of the Future and learn that our many initiatives in resource recovery and organizational culture are meeting the mark set by a distinguished panel of experts," said Commissioner Frank Avila.

"The MWRD strives to embrace this new role as a water utility that can expand our many roles beyond water treatment to ultimately save taxpayers money and protect our environment," said MWRD President Mariyana Spyropoulos.

The MWRD was also honored by Water & Wastes Digest with a "Top Project" for its work on the Thornton Composite Reservoir. The reservoir, located in the Thornton Quarry near Thornton and South Holland off the Tri-State Tollway (I-294/I-80), was completed in late 2015 to become the world's largest combined sewer reservoir. It holds 7.9 billion gallons of water, eliminating pollution from local waterways and saving the area from *(continued)*

## MWRD participates in 89th annual WEFTEC conference *(continued)*



MWRD Vice President McGowan accepted an award on behalf of the MWRD from *Water & Wastes Digest* for work completed on the Thornton Composite Reservoir during the annual Water Environment Federation Technical Exhibition and Conference held in New Orleans. She was joined by (L-R) back row: Elisabeth Lisican, Editor-in-Chief, *Water & Wastes Digest*, and Brian Wawczak, MWRD Senior Civil Engineer; front row, L-R: Commissioner Timothy Bradford and Commissioner Frank Avila.

flooding. It benefits 556,000 people in 14 communities throughout the South Side of Chicago and south suburbs. It protects 182,000 structures, such as homes, businesses and other facilities, and improves water quality in the Calumet Rivers and Cal-Sag Channel by collecting combined sewer overflows before entering waterways.

Senior Civil Engineer Brian Wawczak joined the Commissioners in accepting the award. Wawczak was one of several MWRD experts speaking at WEFTEC. Wawczak presented “Thornton Reservoir: From Active Quarry to 7.9 Billion Gallons of Wet Weather Storage;” MWRD Senior Environmental Soil Scientist Kuldip Kumar presented “Evaluation of Phosphorus from Municipal Wastewater;” MWRD Assistant Director of Engineering Tom Kunetz presented “Innovative Membrane Aerated Bioreactor Pilot Test” and “Evaluation of Performance of Revolving Algae Biofilm System;” MWRD Public and Intergovernmental Affairs Officer Allison Fore and Public Affairs Specialist Dan Wendt presented “Once Upon a Time...Engaging the Public in Your Utility Story;” and Catharine Richardson from Greeley & Hanson, the



MWRD Commissioner Kari Steele accepts the “Water Utility of the Future” recognition.

design engineering consultant for the MWRD’s new ultraviolet disinfection system at the O’Brien Water Reclamation Plant, presented “Rejuvenating the Chicago River: Design and Construction of One of the Largest Wastewater Ultraviolet Disinfection Facilities in the World.”

But it was not only presentations and conversations at WEFTEC. In addition, there was serious action and competition. Again this year, the MWRD competed in the Operations Challenge, which pits water treatment agencies across the world against each other in timed events to demonstrate their skills and expertise in fields like safety, maintenance, lab work, process control and collections. New this year, teams were tasked to rescue an unconscious co-worker from the bottom of a confined space, but in addition, repair a broken check valve in the confined space. Two members of the team have to enter the confined space, rescue the downed worker, while repairing the check valve and restoring the line to service. The team also must cut and replace faulty sections of pipe and take a written test that will use a computer simulator to achieve desired goals for a treatment plant. The Sewer Rats team consists of John Conry, Josh Filler, Sandra Matual, John Malinowski and Darius Flores, who work in Maintenance and Operations at the MWRD.

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### Recovering Resources, Transforming Water

Established in 1889, the MWRD ([www.mwrld.org](http://www.mwrld.org)) is an award-winning, special purpose government agency responsible for wastewater treatment and stormwater management in Cook County, Illinois.