

Pressure Tested!

LA Wrecking Crew uses home team advantage to collect fifth victory



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Home Sweet Home

LA Wrecking Crew's home team advantage wins them another sweet success

Steve Harrison

"Home field advantage is huge," says LA Wrecking Crew [California Water Environment Association (WEA)] captain Bill Shuck. And he would know. Shuck and teammates Gus Caro, Paul Johnson, and Steve Johnson captured their fifth Operations Challenge title at WEFTEC 2000, held Oct. 6-17 in Anaheim, Calif. All are employed by neighboring Los Angeles County's Sanitation District at the Joint Water Pollution Control Plant in Carson, Calif. Benefits to competing on their home turf include sleeping in your own bed, no stress of travel, and it's easier to make last minute adjustments," he continues. While most teams had been away from home for three days by the start of the competition and were still trying to recover from travel stress and time changes, the LA Wrecking Crew were practicing in their own facility the night before the event.



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The 2-day event "ran very smoothly," says Robert Rutherford, Chair of the Operations Challenge Committee. "The event coordinators and judges were great and the teams had a lot of fun."

Operations Challenge Event Coordinators

Committee Chair
Robert Rutherford
Hampton Roads Sanitation District
Newport News, Va.

Laboratory
Charlene Givens
Givens & Associates
Wastewater Co.
Cumberland, Ind.

Safety
Jeff Pratt
Alexandria Sanitation Authority
Alexandria, Va.

Vice-Chair
John Hart
OMI Inc.
Biddeford, Maine

Process Control
Jorj Long
Black & Veatch
Kansas City, Mo.

Scoring
David Vogel
OMI Inc.
Richmond, Va.

Collection Systems
Larry Knight
Fay Spofford & Thorndike
Burlington, Mass.

Maintenance
John Jackman
Somersworth Public Works
Somersworth, N.H.

Thirty-seven teams from 23 member associations in North America competed in the 13th annual competition. Separated into two divisions, the teams competed head to head in five events: Collection Systems, Laboratory, Maintenance, Process Control, and Safety. The LA Wrecking Crew finished first in Maintenance and Safety and second in Process Control and Collection Systems, missing first place in the latter event by less than a second. No strangers to success, the LA Wrecking Crew were national champions from 1993 to 1995 and in 1997.

Career Building Competition

Shuck values all of the team's past victories, but this one, his last, may have been the most rewarding. He was recently promoted to chief operator and will be leaving the team. Like many competitors, Shuck cites participating in the Challenge as contributing to his development as an operator. "I went from a



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The Vermont Sewer Marines (New England Water Environment Association) attend to their "man down" during a simulated chemical spill, placing third in Division 1 of the Safety event.

Class I to a Class III Operator by virtue of preparing for this event," he says. "Taking the certification test

Top 10 Teams Overall

Division 1*	Member Association	Total Points
LA Wrecking Crew*	California	480.23
TRA CREWSers*	Texas	440.92
Connoisseurs*	Arkansas	384.50
Highlanders*	Ontario	354.13
HRSD Bio-Force*	Virginia	351.68
Commode Commandos* (defending champions)	Rocky Mountain	340.56
Vermont Sewer Marines*	New England	308.30
Harrisburg Precision Express*	Pennsylvania	304.86
Bad Conducks*	Pacific Northwest	258.41
Rocky Mountain Prime Pumpers*	Rocky Mountain	248.18
Division 2*	Member Association	Total Points
Cowtown Hustlers	Texas	458.07
River Rangers	Pacific Northwest	455.61
ump Fiction*	New England	444.06
Flush in the Pan*	Ontario	439.16
Orlando Wizards	Florida	422.14
MUD Slingers	California	416.50
Blue Plains Specials*	Chesapeake	413.33
Wastewater Connection	Ohio	410.80
Bowery Bay Bowl Busters*	New York	404.22
Liquidators*	South Carolina	378.22

*indicates returning team

The trophies for each event were contributed by the following individuals.

Collections
John Hart
OMI Inc.
Biddeford, Maine

Laboratory
Melissa Lewandowski
Cole Parmer Instrument
Company
Vernon Hills, Ill.

Maintenance
Larry Hopkins and Ken Rose
Gorman-Rupp Co.
Mansfield, Ohio

Process Control
Bill Shuck
Los Angeles County Sanitation
Districts
Carson, Calif.

Safety
Melissa Lewandowski
Cole Parmer Instrument
Company
Vernon Hills, Ill.

easy compared to the Process Control examination." Shuck intends to remain involved in the competition as a judge, and he has been the event's trophy coordinator for a number of years.

The event also engenders camaraderie among operators throughout North America. In addition to an armful of trophies, the LA Wrecking Crew

received a letter from Texas' Trinity River Authority (TRA) congratulating them on their "outstanding performance at the competition in Anaheim this year ... The Trinity River Authority's Operations Challenge program has been patterned to follow the example of success that the LA Wrecking Crew has achieved."

Top 5 Teams — Process Control Event

Division 1	Member Association	Time	Points
Commode Commandos*	Rocky Mountain	1008.97	100.00
LA Wrecking Crew*	California	1254.03	87.70
Connoisseurs*	Arkansas	1350.63	82.85
Vermont Sewer Marines*	New England	1497.66	75.46
Bad Conducks*	Pacific Northwest	1536.31	73.52
Division 2	Member Association	Time	Points
Orlando Wizards	Florida	1286.84	100.00
Pump Fiction*	New England	1473.94	95.03
LOTT Alliance	Pacific Northwest	1475.47	94.99
Cowtown Hustlers	Texas	1480.53	94.85
Bowery Bay Bowl Busters	New York	1786.29	86.73

*indicates returning team

Top 5 Teams — Laboratory Event

Division 1	Member Association	Time	Points
TRA CREWSers*	Texas	1011.13	100.00
HRSD Bio-Force*	Virginia	1038.33	97.97
Connoisseurs*	Arkansas	1062.26	96.19
LA Wrecking Crew*	California	1105.37	92.97
Rocky Mountain	Rocky Mountain	1154.56	89.30
Prime Pumpers*			
Division 2	Member Association	Time	Points
Wastewater Connection	Ohio	1146.91	100.00
River Rangers	Pacific Northwest	1148.44	99.94
Cowtown Hustlers	Texas	1208.09	97.42
Orlando Wizards	Florida	1506.92	84.83
Nerk's Clearwater Revival	Ohio	1545.18	83.22

*indicates returning team

Top 5 Teams — Safety Event

Division 1	Member Association	Time	Points
LA Wrecking Crew*	California	451.31	100.00
Harrisburg Precision Express*	Pennsylvania	521.91	91.34
Vermont Sewer Marines*	New England	530.20	90.32
TRA CREWSers*	Texas	583.80	83.74
Highlanders*	Ontario	586.81	83.38
Division 2	Member Association	Time	Points
Blue Plains Specials*	Chesapeake	537.29	100.00
Liquidators*	South Carolina	553.40	99.16
River Rangers	Pacific Northwest	598.22	96.84
Pump Fiction*	New England	626.50	95.37
Flush in the Pan*	Ontario	644.60	94.43

*indicates returning team

Using the LA Wrecking Crew as an example for training seems to be working. TRA's CREWSers (WEA of Texas) first competed in 1996, placing 14th in Division II. They subsequently placed fourth in Division II (1997), second in Division II (1998), third in Division I (1999), and, this year, second in Division I. Asked if he realizes that there is just one place left to go, team captain John Bennett says, "Well, we're shooting for three, two, one." Bennett, a chief maintenance mechanic at the TRA's Central Regional Wastewater System (Dallas, Texas), enjoys the competition and "all the really good people involved with it." Bennett also credits the event with "developing the skills that it takes to run a wastewater treatment plant."

Three of the team members now hold Class A licenses, and the team incorporates many elements of their practice regimen into training with other employees of the plant.

Division II Dynamos

The TRA CREWSers' cross-town rivals, the Cowtown Hustlers from the Village Creek



The St. Petersburg Devil Ray Claimers (Florida Water Environment Association) adeptly repair an in-service collections pipe during the Collections event.

Wastewater Treatment Plant (Fort Worth, Texas), finished first in Division II. The Hustlers last competed in 1996, but team captain Gary LaGassey is the only remaining member of the original squad. He noticed that "[the Challenge has] gotten very, very competitive. The skill levels are a lot higher."

Leading three rookies into the competition required LaGassey to call upon his experience.

Top 5 Teams — Maintenance Event

Division 1	Member Association	Time	Points
LA Wrecking Crew*	California	476.71	100.00
TRA CREWSers*	Texas	516.47	86.66
Harrisburg Precision Express*	Pennsylvania	535.28	80.35
Highlanders*	Ontario	544.48	77.27
Bad Conducks*	Pacific Northwest	610.97	54.96
Division 2	Member Association	Time	Points
Flush in the Pan*	Ontario	570.88	100.00
Liquidators*	South Carolina	594.27	98.25
Cowtown Hustlers	Texas	599.40	97.87
Blue Plains Specials*	Chesapeake	620.84	96.27
River Rangers	Pacific Northwest	638.33	94.96

* indicates returning team

Top 5 Teams — Collection Systems Event

Division 1	Member Association	Time	Points
TRA CREWSers*	Texas	99.13	100.00
LA Wrecking Crew*	California	100.09	99.56
Highlanders*	Ontario	100.57	99.35
Connoisseurs*	Arkansas	101.19	99.07
Commode Commandos*	Rocky Mountain	102.95	98.27
Division 2	Member Association	Time	Points
Fecundites	New Jersey	106.65	100.00
Cowtown Hustlers	Texas	134.12	92.22
Pump Fiction*	New England	140.60	90.39
Inertia*	Virginia	146.06	88.84
Flush in the Pan*	Ontario	147.07	88.56

* indicates returning team

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Godwin Pumps of America Inc.	PW Pipe	USFilter
Gorman-Rupp Co.	RootX	USFilter Distribution Center
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Headworks Inc.	Sumitomo Machinery Corp. of	
ITT Flygt Corp.		

"This was the first time that I wasn't a bundle of nerves," he says. According to LaGassey, participating in a regional competition held four weeks before *Operations Challenge* "changed it all" for the Hustlers. With very strong Division I teams competing, the Cowtown Hustlers realized they "could run with the big dogs. We found it very beneficial. It was a big confidence factor," says LaGassey. He also is grateful for the assistance they received from TRA's CREWSers.

Getting Ready at the Regional

The regional competition, which has been held annually since 1998, is an opportunity for teams in the southern United States to prepare for the national event. Hosted by Texas' TRA this September, teams from Arkansas, California, Colorado, Kentucky, and Missouri traveled to



Steve Johnson (left) and Paul Johnson of the of the LA Wrecking Crew (California Water Environment Association), the *Operations Challenge 2000* champions, complete laboratory procedures, placing fourth in the Laboratory event in Division I.

Texas to compete. The Water Environment Federation's *Operations Challenge* Committee Chair, Robert Rutherford of the Hampton Roads Sanitation District (Newport News, Va.), thinks it is no coincidence that the top three teams in Division I and the Division II winner participated in the regional contest. LA Wrecking Crew's Shuck

described participating in the regional as "invaluable. It allows you to identify components of the events that you need to fine tune."



Guy Moriguchi (left) and Clifford Kiger of the KOA Nitrifiers (Hawaii Water Environment Association) break down and rebuild a 3-in. (76-mm) Gorman-Rupp self-priming centrifugal pump during the Maintenance event.

The Rocky Mountain WEA's Commode Commandos, winners of the 1999 *Operations Challenge*, intend to host a regional event next year. When asked about the difficulty of repeating as national champions at this year's Challenge, team member Stacey Walker says, "We didn't think it would play on our minds," and she attributes some this year's missteps to "nerves."

Without a Hitch

After the 2-day event, Rutherford says that this year's Challenge "ran very smoothly. There were very few complaints. The event coordinators and judges were great and the teams had a lot of fun. And tomorrow morning, we start planning next year's Challenge."

Many teams also are keeping next year in mind. "We haven't stopped," says LaGassey. "We're still practicing."

Steve Harrison is a project manager in the Technical Publications department of the Water Environment Federation (Alexandria, Va.).