

Water Environment Federation

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SURPRISE FINISH!

HRSD Bio-Force Wins
2002 Operations Challenge

2002 Ad Awards
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OPERATIONS FORUM

A SPECIAL SECTION FOR OPERATORS, P. 55

HRSD Bio-Force
reclaims the top
Operations Challenge
award in 2002



Take me back to Ol' Virginia

Steve Harrison

Asked after last year's Operations Challenge competition about his team's second-place finish, HRSD Bio-Force team captain Wesley Warren reluctantly accepted the results, vowed to work harder, and fully expected an even tighter competition in 2002. His resolve and foresight led the Virginia Water Environment Association (WEA) team to a one-point victory in this year's competition.

Thirty-six teams from twenty-three North American Member Associations competed in the 15th annual Operations Challenge, held at WEFTEC 02 in Chicago, Ill. Separated into two divisions, the teams competed head to head in five events: collection systems, laboratory analysis, process control, safety, and maintenance [sponsored by ITT-Flygt Corp. (Trumbull, Conn.)]. California WEA's L.A. Wrecking Crew finished second in Division I, followed by WEA of Texas' TRA CREWSers. Less than five points separated the three teams.

Persistence Brings Narrow Win

Hampton Roads Sanitation District (HRSD; Virginia Beach, Va.), which last won the competition in 1998, has long fielded talented, well-coached teams. But because of the attention and speculation



Indiana's Richmond Rotifers repair an in-service section of pipe in the collections event.

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garnered by impressive first-place event scores — a flawless safety event by LA Wrecking Crew, Absolute Pressure's scorching run through the collections event, and three first-place finishes by TRA CREWSers in the laboratory, process control, and maintenance events — the Bio-Force victory came as a surprise to many at the Operations Challenge awards reception.

Various incarnations of the HRSD team have won the event six times, and Warren has been on four of them. But when asked how this victory differed from the others, Warren acknowledged that it "was completely unexpected." Scores are kept confidential until the evening's awards reception, so the team's surprise doesn't imply a lack of confidence.

"Every time we leave for conference, we think we have a chance to win," Warren said. "You have to have some luck on your side, and you have to be consistent." Consistent they were, finishing second in the laboratory and maintenance events, third in the safety event, sixth in the collections event, and seventh in the process control event.

HRSD knows well the necessity of consistency; in 1994, they won four events but finished second overall. "It all comes around," said teammate Mike Harris, who was on the 1994 team. "Having experienced four wins and being announced second, and then having no wins and being announced first, it was just amazing." This year's victory was "one of the most exciting I've ever been involved with," he said. "I was completely dumbfounded."

After 1998's championship, the team weathered some personnel changes in 1999 and 2000 before settling on the current lineup of Warren, Harris, Gene

Groszek, and Joel Niemi. All are HRSD employees: Warren at the Nansemond plant, Groszek at the Atlantic plant, Harris at the Chesapeake-Elizabeth plant, and Joel Niemi at the U.S. Army base plant. Coach George Gregory retired from the District in 1996.

Warren has been competing since 1989. Asked why he continues to participate, he said: "I love the Challenge" and the recognition that comes with it. "It's not everyday an ordinary person has the



Sacramento Wastewater Warrior Carl Scanlon tends to the victim in the safety event.

2002 Operations Challenge Scores

Top Ten Teams Overall

Division I team	Member association	Total points
HRSD Bio-Force	Virginia	457.40
LA Wrecking Crew	California	456.40
TRA CREWSers	Texas	452.91
Absolute Pressure	Virginia	423.54
Commode Commandos	Rocky Mountain	403.33
MUD Slingers	California	456.79
Sacramento Wastewater Warriors	California	343.15
Highlanders	Ontario	325.67
Green Mountain Water Hammer	New England	305.44
Flush in the Pan	Ontario	251.45
Division II team	Member association	Total points
Totally Chaotic	Nevada	490.13
Austin Blues	Texas	477.31
Crustaceans	New England	425.02
True Grit	Arkansas	375.37
Stamford Bafflers	New England	437.38
Royal Flush	Florida	429.99
Cape Shore Workers	New Jersey	417.27
Centrifugal Force	Chesapeake	412.49
Genesee Valley Water Recyclers	New York	410.93
Nitrobacters	Ohio	400.52

opportunity to be the best in the nation at what they do," he explained. "And you meet great people."

This is Warren's last Challenge as a competitor; alternate Erin Girardi will replace him on the team, and Warren expects a fluid transition. Girardi has been training with the team for most of the year and competed with them at a pre-conference event in Nevada. "I think they can repeat" this victory, Warren says.

Harris also likes their chances. He has competed since 1990 and will succeed Warren as the team's captain.

Nevada Takes Division II Award

In Division II, Nevada WEA's Totally Chaotic dominated with three first-place event trophies, first overall, and best uniforms. WEA of Texas' Austin Blues finished second in Division II and New England's Crustaceans were third. Participants noted that the Crustaceans were the team to watch next year and that the Indiana Water Pollution Control Association's Richmond Rotifers showed the best overall effort.

Totally Chaotic's Douglas Jackson, Bryan Ambrose, Rick Anaya, Jarvis Byington, and coach Paul Gielgens are employed at the Henderson, Nev., water reclamation facility. Captain Jackson took what was left of last year's second-place team and picked up where it left off. He credits this year's win to the team's participation in the WEFTEC Warm Up, a friendly competition held about a month before WEFTEC that was co-hosted by the City of



Ontario Highlander Tony Gisitsch approaches the end point of a titration in the laboratory event.

Henderson and Nevada WEA this year. Teams from Arkansas, California, Colorado, Ohio, Texas, Virginia, and Washington, D.C., met in the desert last August to prepare for the national competition.

Collections Event

Division I team	Member association	Points	
Absolute Pressure	Virginia	117.00	100.00
Highlanders	Ontario	123.72	97.24
LA Wrecking Crew	California	124.38	96.97
MUD Slingers	California	126.44	96.13
Green Mountain Water Hammer	New England	146.29	87.98
Division II team	Member association	Points	
Totally Chaotic	Nevada	117.94	100.00
Canadian Cross Connection	British Columbia	167.41	94.50
True Grit	Arkansas	169.00	94.33
Cape Shore Workers	New Jersey	171.00	94.10
Crustaceans	New England	185.63	92.48

Laboratory Event

Division I team	Member association	Points	
TRA CrewSers	Texas	981.42	100.00
HRSD Bio-Force	Virginia	999.44	97.12
LA Wrecking Crew	California	1035.59	91.35
Absolute Pressure	Virginia	1150.84	72.96
MUD Slingers	California	1155.59	72.20
Division II team	Member association	Points	
Totally Chaotic	Nevada	1192.49	100.00
Nitrobacters	Ohio	1261.40	96.68
True Grit	Arkansas	1271.69	96.18
Crustaceans	New England	1303.86	94.63
Austin Blues	Texas	1366.08	91.63

"It really helps you fix a lot of the little mistakes," Jackson said, and eliminates the jitters some teams experience at the national competition. "We weren't nervous at all," he said.

Nevada also hosted three teams in Operations Challenge II, a two-person competition created to encourage participation by employees of smaller facilities. The teams must come from plants treating less than 10 mgd (XX m³/d) that have fewer than 20 employees. This year, the Industrial Strength team of Andy Rudd and George Talley from OMI/Dupont-Spruance won the event, coached by Tabb Justis. (HRSD plans to host the preparatory event and Operations Challenge II in September 2003.)

New Awards Honor Spirit of the Challenge

Nevada's uniform recognition was part of the new spirit awards, which have been added to

recognize the essence of Operations Challenge: teamwork, unity, competition, and fun. Competitors and judges cast ballots for their peers in five categories: team uniforms, best hard hats, team congeniality, best effort, and team to watch out for next year. WEA of Ontario's Highlanders took home the team congeniality award, and Rocky Mountain WEA's Commode Commandos and Virginia WEA's Absolute Pressure shared best hard hat awards.

Many new teams quickly capture the energy and enthusiasm. For example, New Jersey WEA's Cape Shore Workers finished seventh in Division II in their first national competition, and "everybody just loved it," said captain Nick Salfi. "We learned a lot." Using what they witnessed, they improved their practice times in several events just days after returning from the competition and won the New Jersey WEA title the following year.

ITT-Flygt Maintenance Event

Division I team	Member association	Points	
TRA CreWSers	Texas	650.34	100.00
HRSD Bio-Force	Virginia	701.00	95.51
Commode Commandos	Rocky Mountain	802.60	86.51
Highlanders	Ontario	848.93	82.41
Cowtown Hustlers	Texas	852.53	82.09
Division II team	Member association	Points	
Austin Blues	Texas	762.85	100.00
Nitrobacters	Ohio	838.66	96.95
True Grit	Arkansas	906.60	94.23
Totally Chaotic	Nevada	920.00	93.69
Stamford Bafflers	New England	945.84	92.65

Process Control

Division I team	Member association	Points	
TRA CreWSers	Texas	1794.00	100.00
Commode Commandos	Rocky Mountain	1898.02	97.18
MUD Slingers	California	2100.00	91.70
Green Mountain Water Hammer	New England	2104.55	91.58
River Rangers	Pacific Northwest	2145.00	90.48
Division II team	Member association	Points	
Crustaceans	New England	1595.00	100.00
Austin Blues	Texas	1653.00	98.43
Totally Chaotic	Nevada	1720.00	96.62
Stamford Bafflers	New England	1808.00	94.23
Centrifugal Force	Chesapeake	1974.38	89.73

Safety Event

Division I team	Member association	Points	
LA Wrecking Crew	California	242.70	100.00
Absolute Pressure	Virginia	284.37	93.06
HRSD Bio-Force	Virginia	292.21	91.76
TRA CreWSers	Texas	343.64	83.20
MUD Slingers	California	398.67	74.04
Division II team	Member association	Points	
Totally Chaotic	Nevada	378.00	100.00
Crustaceans	New England	467.90	96.25
Cape Shore Workers	New Jersey	480.20	95.73
Austin Blues	Texas	498.64	94.96
Nitrobacters	Ohio	499.06	94.94



In the maintenance event, New England's Crustaceans repair an ITT-Flygt pump while their fans look on.

Their third-place finish in this year's safety event was no accident. Salfi is captain of the Emergency Response Team at the Cape May County Municipal Utilities Authority's Wildwood/Lower Region Plant and readily acknowledges the reciprocal benefits of his Response Team duties and safety event training.

Likewise, Kentucky-Tennessee WEA's Wastewater 101 of Jackson, Tenn., had not competed before, and captain James Harris said the team found it "enlightening and were very

impressed by how competitive it was." Inspired, the team has vowed that next year "we're going to be like the LA Wrecking Crew," he said. "We're going to come in and do some damage."

Because the Crustaceans' team members work at four different plants throughout New Hampshire, the logistics of practice can be grueling but worth it, as captain Sean Greig notes. "We love it," he said. "I would recommend it to anyone." In addition to "making a bunch of friends from all over the country," he added, "[Operations Challenge] is unmatched as a tool for networking, problem solving, and innovation. Where I am (professionally) compared to just 2 years ago is unbelievable. It has been tremendous."

Steve Harrison is a project manager at the Water Environment Federation (Alexandria, Va.).

Thank You

The Water Environment Federation would like to thank the following companies for their contributions to Operations Challenge 2002:

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