

COMMAND

Commode Commandos Clinch
Ops Challenge Win see page 74

PERFORMANCE

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**OPERATIONS
FORUM** Page 71

Consistency Carries Commandos to Championship

At the 20th annual Operations Challenge in San Diego, consistency carried the day for the Commode Commandos from the Rocky Mountain Water Environment Association. The team clinched the Division I win without placing in any individual event.

In fact, team captain Stacey Walker said she was surprised when they won. "We weren't expecting it," she said. "We didn't finish in the top three in any of the events, so we weren't sure how we did overall. We were hoping for at least third, but we were pretty excited when we got first."

The team took fourth place in the Safety event, fifth in the Laboratory, Process Control, and Collection Systems events, and seventh in the Godwin Pump Maintenance event.

The Commode Commandos from the Rocky Mountain Water Environment Association performed consistently in every event in Operations Challenge 2007 to win the Division I title. Here team members Brian Pritekel, Caleb Vannice, and Chong Woo compete in the Collection Systems event.

OPERATIONS

Division I	Member Association	Points
1. Commode Commandos	Rocky Mountain WEA	393.661
2. Team HRSD	Virginia WEA	387.667
3. TRA CReWSers	WEA of Texas	368.686



CHALLENGE 2007

Division II	Member Association	Points
1. Force Maine	New England WEA	459.911
2. Brown Tide	New York WEA	447.913
3. Ft. Worth Regulators	WEA of Texas	436.378

For all the standings
and a photo gallery, see
www.wef.org/magazine.

PHOTO BY GREG HAMMER

"You know, I don't know if we could ever win first, second, or third in a single event again because all of the teams are just so darn fast," Walker said. "The fact that we were able to hang with them and actually win was pretty cool."

The Commode Commandos team lineup has been the same for the past 3 years. They are Walker, Chong Woo, Caleb Vannice, and Brian Pritekel, with Leonard Robb serving as the team's coach.

The team began holding 1- to 2- hour practice sessions only about a month before the competition, Walker said. Each week the team would hold two or three sessions, and each member studied for the Process Control event separately.

"We crammed a whole lot of quality practice into a small amount of time," Walker said. "We wanted to be as penalty-free as possible. We accomplished that; we only had two penalties the whole day."

She said that the team became smooth and fast at the Safety Event and was confident in its performance.

"I was most worried about Process Control because you never know what those process questions are going to be and how long they're going to take you

and whether you're going to be nervous and choke on them or pull it out and do OK."

This is the second time the Commode Commandos have won the Division I title. They also won in 1999, when Walker and coach Robb were both team members. In fact, in the competition's 20-year history, Walker is only woman on a winning Division I team.

"It's not new for me," she said. "I was the first girl on my baseball team when I was 5 years old."

She added that she's glad to see more women competing. "We're just as



GREG FARMER

This is the second time winning a Division I title for the Commode Commandos; they first won in 1999. Team member Stacey Walker (pictured above in the Laboratory event) and Coach Leonard Robb were members of the 1999 team. In the competition's 20-year history, Walker is the only female member of a Division I winning team.

"Working with the different pumps gives us good variety and teaches us."

Doug Koss, Michigan Water
Environment Association
Midland Microbes

Process Control Event

Event Coordinator: Mike Ross, OMI Inc.
(Englewood, Colo.)

Division I Winners

1. S.C.R.A.P.P.E.R.S. (Ohio WEA)
2. Fluid Dynamics (Virginia WEA)
3. L.A. Wrecking Crew (California WEA)

Division II Winners

1. Force Maine (New England WEA)
2. Reno-Sparks Rattlers (Nevada WEA)
3. Midland Microbes (Michigan WEA)



Trophy contributed by Rob Villeg, Plainfield Area Regional
Sewerage Authority (Middlesex, N.J.).

Collection Systems Event

Event Coordinator: John Trofater,
Accusonic Technologies (W. Wareham, Mass.)

Division I Winners

1. Power SAWS (WEA of Texas)
2. Team HRSD (Virginia WEA)
3. Seacoast Sewer Snakes (New England WEA)

Division II Winners

1. Wasatch All Stars (WEA of Utah)
2. Fecal Matters (New England WEA)
3. Sludge Hammers (WEA of Ontario)



Trophy contributed by Kathleen Dyekman, Hach Co.
(Loveland, Colo.).



Calvin Norman and Thai Nguyen of the Aqua Techs from the Water Environment Association of Texas work to complete the Godwin Pump Maintenance event while Peter Snow of Godwin Pumps judges. The Aqua Techs won first place in the event in Division I.

capable as the guys are," she said.

In fact, Captain Brian Cataldo of the Division II winners, Force Maine, gave special credit to teammate Mary Ann Peck for helping to secure a first-place win in the Process Control event.

Looking Ahead

So, will the same group of Commandos be back next year to defend the championship?

"Oh yeah!" Walker said. "I believe so." She explained that one Commando was wavering, but if the plant's construction project ends on

schedule, he should be able to stick with the team.

"Now that we've won and we've performed so well and we did so well together, I think we're all pretty motivated to come back," she said.

Walker said she has seen all of the teams in the competition grow more serious. "They put a lot of time and practice in; you can tell because the times for the events are getting faster and faster. It's kind of unbelievable to imagine how some of these things can happen within two and a half minutes."

She added that the addition of the Spirit Awards has enhanced the experience. The spirit awards honor various team aspects of Operations Challenge, such as best team uniform, best helmet design, and most congenial.

"It's neat to see all of the teams get excited about getting nice uniforms and the full paint jobs on the helmets. Everyone is just really more into it, and I think it makes it more exciting and makes it more special."

**"My favorite thing
[about Operations Challenge]
is all the networking"**

Dan Laflamme,
New England Water Environment
Association Force Maine

Safety Event

Event Coordinator: Richard Leger, City of Henderson, Nev.

Division I Winners

1. TRA CREWSers (WEA of Texas)
2. Team HRSD (Virginia WEA)
3. Fluid Dynamics (Virginia WEA)

Division II Winners

1. Wasatch All Stars (WEA of Utah)
2. Sludge Hammers (Ontario WEA)
3. Aurora's Ascending Aerobes (Rocky Mountain WEA)

Trophy contributed by Dorcas Hermes, WBE Dorcas Inc. (Cripple Creek, Colo.).



Godwin Pump Maintenance Event

Event Coordinator: Ginny Farmer, Autawash (Aurora, Colo.)

Division I Winners

1. Aqua Techs (WEA of Texas)
2. L.A. Wrecking Crew (California WEA)
3. SRCSD Interceptors (California WEA)

Division II Winners

1. Sludge Hammers (Ontario WEA)
2. Brown Tide (New York WEA)
3. Dillo XXpress (WEA of Texas)

Trophy contributed by Bryan Gassler, Godwin Pumps (Bridgeport, N.J.).



Force Maine Pushes for Division II Win

The members of Force Maine from the New England Water Environment Association assembled in San Diego — from treatment plants scattered across Maine — to succeed in their goal of 3 years: to take home the Division II trophy.

"As a team, it's been a goal of ours to excel in Division II," said Captain Brian Cataldo. "We had targets on event times that we had set for ourselves, and we knew that if we ran clean in those times that we would do pretty well."

This is the third year that Force Maine has competed as a team, and each year has featured the same roster. They are Cataldo, Mary Anne Peck, Travis Peaslee, and Dan LaFlamme. Skip Clough serves as the team's coach.

"Throughout the course of the day, we had learned that we had a very respectable time in the Process Control event, which we had won the last 2 years," Cataldo said. "So, all 3 years that we have competed as a team, we have won the Process Control event. Other than that, we knew that we were staying competitive and keeping our penalties to a minimum, which, I think in the end, was what got us the win."

The team won first place in the Process Control event, eighth place in the Safety event, ninth place in the Laboratory event, tenth place in the Collection Systems event, and twelfth in the Godwin Pump Maintenance event.

Training for the team took some coordination since the members are spread throughout southern Maine, Cataldo said. "We had a great facility host. Saco, Maine, let us use a garage to practice in, but we all had to travel [for practice]."

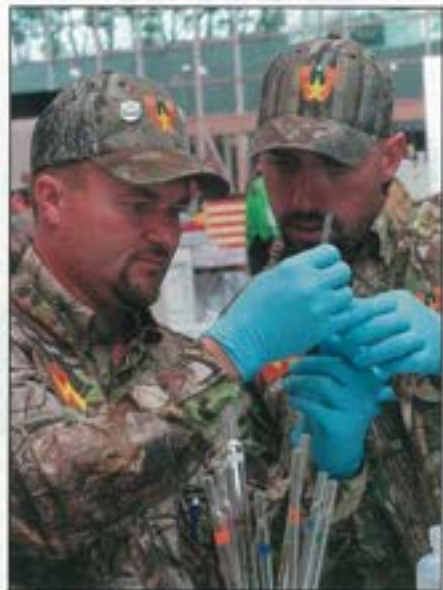
The team's practice approach was to continually improve. "We tried to take a consistent approach at learning our tasks and learning each of the other members' tasks, so, as we got into the event, we didn't leave anything behind," Cataldo said.

He said once the team members got into the competition, they focused on remaining calm and "trying to keep cool and looking at the day as one event at a time."

As for moving into Division I next year, Cataldo remained cautious. "It will take quite a bit more practice on our part to become competitive in that division," he said. "If we do compete, we will want to be competitive."

How would you describe the Operations Challenge experience overall?

"It's one of the best things for operators," Cataldo said. "It really keeps you interested. I don't think there are a lot of outlets in the professional world that let you compete against your peers and, at the same time, meet new people and knowing they're in it for the same cause."



OSCAR EINZIG

Kody Roholt and Cory Snyder of the Wasatch All-Stars from the Water Environment Association of Utah concentrate on the Laboratory event. This was the first year the team has competed in Operations Challenge, and it performed exceptionally well, winning first place in the Collection Systems and Safety events.

"I enjoy working with three other teammates and getting that camaraderie."

Ed Choury, Rocky Mountain Water Environment Association Aurora's Ascending Aerobes

Laboratory Event

Event Coordinator: Staci Metzler, Hampton Roads Sanitary District (Virginia Beach, Va.)

Division I Winners

1. TRA CREWSers (WEA of Texas)
2. Team HRSD (Virginia WEA)
3. Fluid Dynamics (Virginia WEA)

Division II Winners

1. Influent (South Carolina WEA)
2. Reno-Sparks Rattlers (Nevada WEA)
3. Die-Jesters (Pennsylvania WEA)



Trophy contributed by Wesley Warren, Hampton Roads Sanitation District (Virginia Beach, Va.).

Operations Challenge Celebrates 20 Years



WEFTEC®.07 in San Diego hosted the 20th annual Operations Challenge, and the event certainly has expanded since its humble beginnings. The first Operations Challenge began as a three-person ad hoc committee formed by Water Environment Federation (WEF; Alexandria, Va.) Past President Al Goodman and featured 22 teams from 15 member associations. This year, Operations Challenge included 41 teams from 23 member associations.

Jim Miller, a member of the Central States Water Environment Association (WEA) Shovelers, has participated in all 20 competitions. He says that while competing in the event through the years has been thrilling, there have been many changes.

One major change Miller has witnessed is how much time the teams practice. This year the Shovelers, who are spread across Illinois, Minnesota, and Wisconsin, met in Madison, Wis., for two practices, he said. For the first 10 years of the competition, his team didn't practice, Miller noted.

Now, teams practice for months before Operations Challenge, with some teams practicing multiple times per week. "A lot of the teams are really training for it," Miller said.

Operations Challenge also has provided Miller a chance to develop others' careers, as well as his own. He said that Operations Challenge has allowed him to network with other operators and gives younger members the opportunity to attend WEFTEC.

"I doubt I'd be where I am in my career [without Operations Challenge]," Miller said.

The Laboratory event represents a microcosm of the evolution of the Operations Challenge.

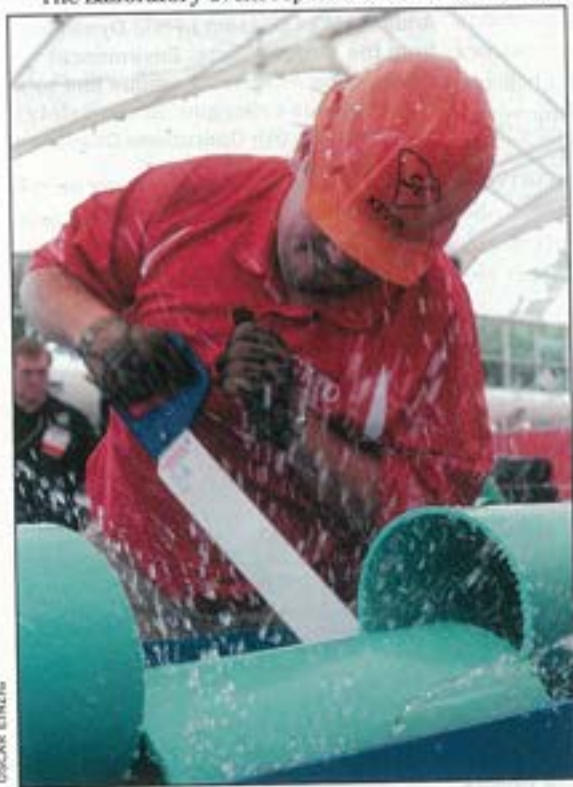
In its first year, the event required participants to complete three of 10 possible laboratory tasks. In this year's event, teams had to complete the entire procedure necessary to determine biochemical oxygen demand following Method 5210B from the 18th edition of *Standard Methods for the Examination of Water and Wastewater*.

"The events are more sophisticated," said Jane Winkler, laboratory manager for the City of Hamilton (Ohio), who has judged the Laboratory event every year of the competition. "We started out 20 years ago faking fecal coliform plates by putting blue dots on them, and now we set up a full BOD analysis."

Kathy Cook, who is a member of the Ohio WEA and founded the WEF Lab Practices Committee 20 years ago, agrees with Winkler. She said that the teams are much more skillful than their earlier counterparts and that the events have evolved to become more in tune with what operators are facing every day at work.

"The competitors now are more sophisticated and knowledgeable than they were at the beginning," she said.

Miller agreed with Winkler and Cook, praising all five events of operations challenge as well defined and quite realistic. He does, however, have a preference for the Collection Systems event for one simple reason. "It's just brute strength," he said.



Kevin Fleming of the Division II Influents from the Water Environment Association of South Carolina finishes cutting out the pipe in the Collection Systems event. The teams had to remove a section of pipe, fashion and install a replacement section with a service saddle, and install a flowmeter.

**"When I compete,
it's for my region.
I feel like I am a mentor
for my region."**

**Duane McCoy, Chesapeake Water
Environment Association
Centrifugal Force**

The Give and Take of Sponsorship

Operations Challenge couldn't happen without its sponsors. Year after year, these companies donate time, money, equipment, and resources to help ensure the event is a success.

For example, each year for the Operations Challenge, Godwin Pumps (Bridgeport, N.J.) provides the pumps for the Godwin Pump Maintenance event. The company prepares and ships four Godwin Drive Prime® model CD100M 4-in., diesel-driven, solids-handling, trailer-mounted pump sets and all of the needed ancillary equipment, said national sales manager Joe Abbot.

Jane Winkler, a judge for the Laboratory Event and veteran of all 20 competitions, credits the increasing sophistication and advancement of the events to the generosity of the sponsors.

"In addition to sending the equipment here for us to use," she said, "they provide tech support."

This year, USA BlueBook (Waukegan, Ill.) provided the glassware for the Laboratory event and the fall restraint equipment for the Safety event, WTW Inc. (West Wareham, Mass.)

provided the meters for the Laboratory event, and Hach Co. (Loveland, Colo.) provided the flowmeters for the Collection Systems event.

And along the way, the sponsors get swept into the fervor of the competition, just like everyone else who participates.

"The mechanics in our shops really get into preparing the pumps for the competition," Abbott said. In fact, Godwin's sales representatives and mechanics

sometimes serve as judges at regional Operations Challenge competitions. "These guys go down there on their Saturdays to participate," he noted.

Godwin also sends a mechanic to the competition to prepare the pump onsite and perform any needed repairs between events. For example, at last year's event, Abbott said, a jack stand broke and needed to be repaired. "My guy could just reach into his box of parts and tools and fix it up," he said.

"The operators are great guys," Abbott said. "Their level of skill and commitment to their jobs is impressive."

"Teamwork is important."

Juju Xia, New York Water Environment Association
Bowery Bay Bowl Busters

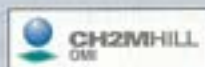


OSCAR EINZIG

Andy Rydd of Division I Fluid Dynamics from the Virginia Water Environment Association attaches a rescue line to an "unconscious colleague" in the Safety event of the 20th Operations Challenge.

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A Competitor's View

Ed Rushbrook, Division I Seacoast Sewer Snakes

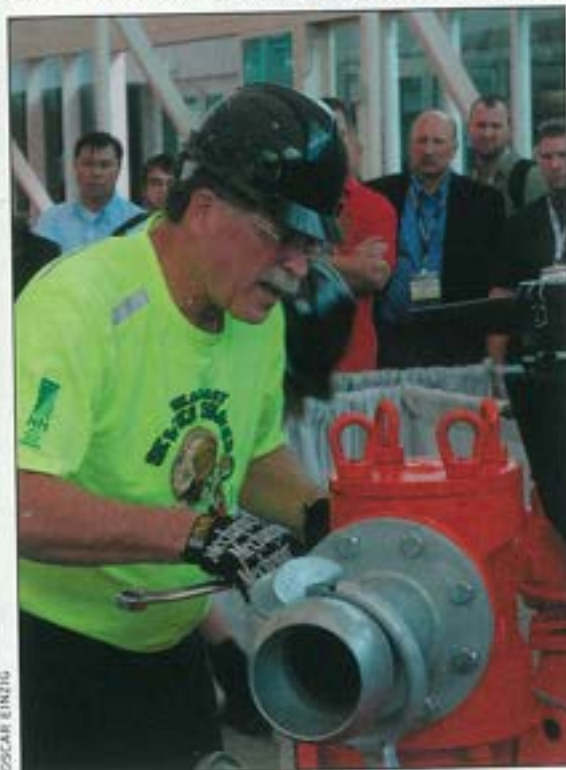


To many people, Operations Challenge may appear to be four people getting together for a day, frantically working their way through a written test, cutting holes in pipe, operating a hoist on a tripod, tearing down a pump, and performing a lab procedure. Having coached a team for two years and participated for one, I've learned that it's a lot more than that.

It wasn't until I became a coach that I realized how much work goes into planning, training, and getting to the competition. But once there, the dedication and effort pay off in many ways.

First, each team member gets a sense of personal satisfaction and accomplishment for achieving the goal of competing on a regional basis to qualify and compete nationally.

Second, each of the four members learns the value of teamwork firsthand. Knowing that each team member is responsible for performing specific tasks, and that the team's success and the other team members' performance is dependant on your own task being performed efficiently, builds a strong sense of teamwork.



Ed Rushbrook of the Division I Seacoast Sewer Snakes competes in the Godwin Pump Maintenance event.

"This is completely overwhelming. You always hear how impressive this competition is, but until you come here and see it, you just can't understand the magnitude."

Tom Crane, Utah Water Environment Association Wasatch All Stars

Third, they learn that the roles of both leading and following are important to the team. By the nature of the events, it's necessary for a team's captain to lead the group through the competition — advising, guiding, encouraging, and, in some cases, correcting team members' performance. Those comments need to be made with tact and diplomacy and followed with discipline. "Know your job and do it well" quickly becomes a team motto.

All three of these characteristics follow Operations Challenge team members back into the workplace.

The personal payoff can come in several forms. If a team is successful and places in one of the top three positions in its division, there's tremendous pride in bringing that trophy home. Competing on a national basis gives competitors, and sometimes their families, the chance to travel and enjoy seeing the sights of the conference's host city.

Competing in Operations Challenge helps build team members' problem-solving skills, their sense of teamwork, their mechanical skills, and increases their wastewater knowledge as a whole. Ask any team, and they will tell you that they carry these rewards home.

*Written and edited by Steve Spicer and Michael Bonsiewicz.
Additional reporting by Britt Sheinbaum and Steve Harrison.*