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CReWSers reclaim the crown in Operations Challenge



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TRA CReWSers Reclaim

Written by Steve Spicer, *Operations Forum* editor.

The TRA CREWSers, David Brown, Steve Price, Jake Burwell, and captain Dale Burrow, work together to win third place in the Collections System event. The team earned trophies in four of five events.

Excellent performances in four of five events carried the TRA CREWSers to the Division I championship in the 21st Annual Operations Challenge in Chicago. This makes the third win in 4 years for the team from the Water Environment Association of Texas.

The team includes captain Dale Burrow, Jacob Burwell, Steve Price, and David Brown. Raudel Juarez coached the team. The team posted the same roster as last year when the CREWSers earned third place in San Diego.



Division I	Member Association	Points
TRA CREWSers	WEA of Texas	469.72
LA Wrecking Crew	California WEA	455.58
s.C.R.A.P.P.E.R.S.	Ohio WEA	446.17
Division II	Member Association	Points
Terminal Velocity	Virginia WEA	494.02
Wasatch All Stars	WEA of Utah	452.58
Wasted Gas	WEA of Utah	448.29

For a complete listing of team scores and a photo gallery, see www.wef.org/magazine.

Operations Challenge Title

Special thanks to Steve Harrison.



The LA Wrecking Crew from the California Water Environment Association won the Division I Collections System event. The team members are (left to right) Dale Dollins, Steve Johnson, Paul Johnson, and Jeff Valdes.

As Burrow said during this year's competition, "We just want to get back on top again."

On their way to claiming victory, the CREWSers earned

strategy that led to Division I wins in 2005 and 2006: Complete each event with as few penalties as possible without worrying too much about the time it takes.

"You can't worry about the other teams. You just have to run what your team is capable of running and run it clean."

Dale Burrow, TRA CREWSers

trophies in four of the five events. They took home first place in the Safety and Pump Maintenance events and third place in the Collection Systems and Laboratory events.

The team relied on the same

"You can't worry about the other teams," Burrow said. "You just have to run what your team is capable of running and run it clean."

One change the team embraced this year was the

moving of the Laboratory event to Monday. In past years, teams completed just the Process Control event on Monday and tackled the Laboratory, Pump Maintenance, Collection Systems, and Safety events on Tuesday.

"Having four events in one day just wears us out," Burrow said. "Having three events in a physical day is the way to go, in my opinion. 'Most of the runs, you're really amped up, and when you go in to handle the glassware and the pipettes, you're still a little shaky.'"

The second and third place Division I winning teams also relied on consistency and penalty-free performances. The LA Wrecking Crew from the California Water Environment Association secured second place, and the s.C.R.A.P.P.E.R.S. from the Ohio Water Environment Association took third. Both teams also earned trophies in individual events. In fact, the top three teams walked away with the first-place trophies from all of the events.

Earning first place in the Collection Systems event this year was especially important for the LA Wrecking Crew. At last year's competition in San Diego, the team's pipe repair leaked, and the resulting penalty probably cost the team the Division I title,



Process Control Event

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

Division I Winners

1. LA Wrecking Crew (California WEA)
2. Seacoast Sewer Snakes (New England WEA)
3. s.C.R.A.P.P.E.R.S. (Ohio WEA)

Division II Winners

1. Terminal Velocity (Virginia WEA)
2. Reno/Sparks Rattlers (Nevada WEA)
3. Pumpers (Central States WEA)



Collections System Event

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

Division I Winners

1. LA Wrecking Crew (California WEA)
2. Cape Shore Workers (New Jersey WEA)
3. TRA CREWSers (WEA of Texas)

Division II Winners

1. Sludge Hammers (WEA of Ontario)
2. Terminal Velocity (Virginia WEA)
3. Wasatch All Stars (WEA of Utah)

according to team member Steve Johnson.

"After last year, it was a very good feeling to leave [the Collection Systems event] being pretty sure we had won it," Johnson said.

The LA Wrecking Crew also won first place in the Process Control event. Moreover, the team — captain Paul Johnson, Dale Dollins, Steve Johnson, and

Jeff Valdes — averaged more than 90 points in each event.

"That's what we're talking about in terms of a consistent day," Paul Johnson said.

"Consistency helps every team," according to Kevin Givins, captain of the s.C.R.A.P.P.E.R.S.. For the third year, they have had the same team: Givins, Jim Borton, Bob King, and B.J. Reichert.

"Stick with the game that got

you there, and don't do too much different," is the advice that Givins gives to newer teams. Sometime you have to adjust to different interpretations of the rules when you get there, he said. "But try to run the event that you've been running all along."

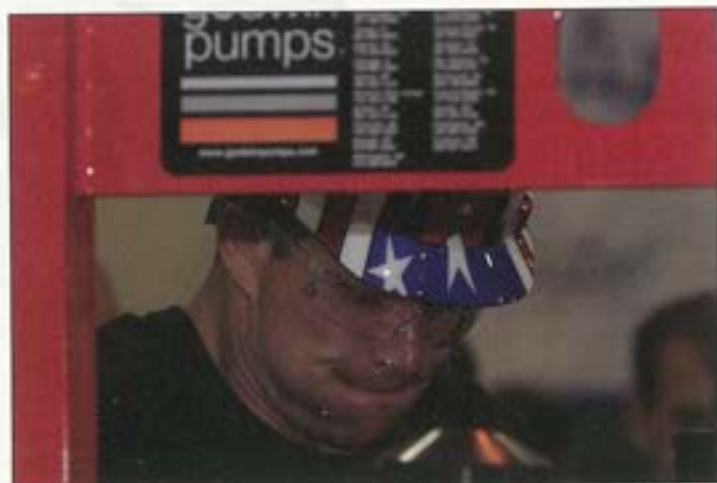
The s.C.R.A.P.P.E.R.S.'s consistency paid off with a first-place trophy for the Laboratory event.

Terminal Velocity Speeds Past Division II Competition



A new team full of familiar faces dominated Division II. Terminal Velocity from the Virginia Water Environment Association includes captain Donnie Cagle, Paul Cubilla, Stephen Motley, and Robert Williams. Elijah Smith coaches the team, and Jason Truitt serves as assistant coach and alternate. In years past, Cagle and Cubilla competed on two Division I national championship teams, Cagle said.

"Paul and I are the only two people who have ever won all three of the different divisions at the national championship," he said. In addition to their previous



Gordon Call of the Wasatch All Stars concentrates on the Pump Maintenance event. The All Stars, who are from the Water Environment Association of Utah, took first place in that event in Division II.

Safety Event

Event Coordinator: Starlin Jones, City of Sparks, Nev.

Division I Winners

1. TRA CREWSers (WEA of Texas)
2. Team HRSD (Virginia WEA)
3. Cape Shore Workers (New Jersey WEA)

Division II Winners

1. Terminal Velocity (Virginia WEA)
2. Wasted Gas (WEA of Utah)
3. DELCORA Loonatics (Pennsylvania WEA)



Pump Maintenance Event

Event Coordinator: Ginny Farmer, GEA Power Cooling (Lakewood, Colo.)

Division I Winners

1. TRA CREWSers (WEA of Texas)
2. Cape Shore Workers (New Jersey WEA)
3. s.C.R.A.P.P.E.R.S. (Ohio WEA)

Division II Winners

1. Wasatch All Stars (WEA of Utah)
2. SRSCD Interceptors (California WEA)
3. Terminal Velocity (Virginia WEA)



Division I wins and this year's Division II win, the pair won the first-ever Operations Challenge II — a two-person competition — in Atlanta in 2001. "We sort of joke about it being the trifecta," Cagle said.

In this year's competition, Terminal Velocity won first place in the Laboratory, Process Control, and Safety events. The team also earned a second-place trophy on the Collection Systems event and third place in the Pump Maintenance event.

"We had a really, really good day," Cagle said. "There's not much too much we would change about it."

The second- and third-place spots in Division II were both taken by teams from the Water Environment Association of Utah. The Wasatch All Stars secured second, and Wasted Gas grabbed third.

This is the first year that the Water Environment Association of Utah has had two teams competing in Operations Challenge at WEFTEC. Each year the Member Association selects the best team members from its state competition and creates the Wasatch All Stars. This year, however, an increase in membership earned the organization in another spot in WEF's House of Delegates as well as another Operations Challenge slot at WEFTEC. That second slot went to Wasted Gas.

The Wasatch All Stars — Gordon Call, Marlo Davis, Bret Olson, Jeff Terry, and Jeff Kirkman — also earned first place in the Pump Maintenance event and third place in the Collection Systems event.

Wasted Gas — Darin Morris, Timothy Madsen, Jared S. O'Brien, Josh Hunsaker, and Calvin Reilly — earned a second-place trophy in the Safety event.



The Ohio Water Environment Association s.C.R.A.P.P.E.R.S.— D.J. Reichert, Kevin Givins, Jim Borton, and Bob King — earned first place in the Laboratory event. This was the first year that this event was held on Monday along with Process Control.



John Reardon, Art Cowan, and Nick Saffi of the New Jersey Water Environment Association Cape Shore Workers succeeded in placing second in the Pump Maintenance event. The team also earned a second- and third-place award in the Collections System and Safety events, respectively.



Laboratory Event

Event Coordinator: Stacie Metzler, Hampton Roads Sanitation District (Virginia Beach, Va.)

Division I Winners

1. s.C.R.A.P.P.E.R.S. (Ohio WEA)
2. Team HRSD (Virginia WEA)
3. TRA CREWSers (WEA of Texas)

Division II Winners

1. Terminal Velocity (Virginia WEA)
2. SRSCD Interceptors (California WEA)
3. DELCORA Loonatics (Pennsylvania WEA)

'Challenge' Experience Boosts Careers, Morale

Competition yields improved job skills, communications



Even though every Operations Challenge team didn't go home with a trophy, they all did go home with stronger skills, a better appreciation of what their coworkers do, and stronger bonds with their counterparts from other utilities worldwide. Through Operations Challenge operators develop skills that they otherwise might never pick up, learn how to work as a team, and find new and more efficient ways to tackle problems.

"With Operations Challenge, the basic elements are all composed of things the operators do day-to-day in their own work environment," said Adam Zabinski, then president of the Water Environment Federation (Alexandria, Va.).

The competition encourages teams to find the most efficient ways to handle daily tasks as quickly as possible. During the challenge, this leads to quicker times; at the plant it leads to more efficiency, he explained.

Pump Maintenance

Each of the events helps with professional development in a different way, according

to Jeff Pratt, chairman on the Operations Challenge committee. In the Pump Maintenance event, for example, a mechanic learns a tremendous amount about that single pump, pump stations, and safety procedures, he explained.

"But then you take other people who are not mechanics and you put them in the same event; they get an appreciation for what a mechanic has to do," Pratt said. He added that such training also could enable nonmechanics to lend a hand during periods of short staffing.

Laboratory

Likewise, the Laboratory event exposes competitors to tasks and skills that they might never encounter otherwise, according to Stacie Metzler, the event coordinator. The competition provides a great opportunity for cross training, she said. Two years ago she changed what the Laboratory event entailed; competitors now must complete a biochemical oxygen demand analysis.

"You give these guys a saw that could cut off their arms, and

they're completely fine," Metzler said. "But hand them a pipette and bulb, and they'll be shaking so badly they'll have a hard time getting the tip in a beaker."

However, during her tenure as event coordinator, she said she has witnessed the teams' laboratory skills improve dramatically.

"We had a really, really good day. There's not much too much we would change about it."

Donnie Cagle, Terminal Velocity

The questions that the teams ask at the pre-competition meeting indicate they understand the components well enough that they can dissect the event to find new ways to approach the competition, said Lora Ann Reed, a Laboratory event judge.

Process Control

Other competitors get cross-training from other events.

"I work in the lab and I had no knowledge of process control until I got involved in Ops Challenge," said Stacey Walker, captain of the Commode Commandos from the Rocky Mountain Water Environment Association. She said that the Process Control event has helped her understand what samples are being collected in the plant, as well as what the consequences are of an abnormal result.

As an added benefit, the Process Control event also helps team members prepare for their operator certification exams, Pratt



Terminal Velocity from the Virginia Water Environment Association earned second place in the Collections System event in Division II. In fact, the team won trophies in every event as well as the Division II title.

said. The questions and format of the two tests might differ, but the Process Control information is still relevant for certification prep.

Pratt added that the Process Control event highlights how the four-member teams competing at the Operations Challenge represent only a fraction of a facility's participation.

"More than likely, there were other people at their facility that helped them train," Pratt said. If the team doesn't include a process expert, it probably had a process manager help it prepare, he said. "That in turn would further the knowledge of the process manager because he would need to do some research to help with training."

Safety

As a safety manager, Pratt said he is partial to the Safety event. This event teaches about lock out-tag out routines, fall protection measures, permit-required confined space practices and equipment, and decontamination procedures.

"That one event just encompasses so many different aspects of safety," Pratt said. "No matter what job a person has at a wastewater treatment plant, it's very beneficial for them."



Jared O'Brien and Calvin Reilley of Wasted Gas from the Water Environment Association of Utah work to rescue the victim in the Safety event. The team earned a second place finish in that event in Division II.

Beyond the Events

Sharper skills and abilities are just the beginning of what competitors receive from Operations Challenge. The teams also come home with better communication and leadership skills and new ideas.

"I think it's great for communication," Walker said. "You just have a better overall knowledge of the whole reason you're there, what the whole point

of working at the plant is, instead of getting compartmentalized in your own department."

Operations Challenge "helps as a team-building experience," Pratt said. "It teaches how to communicate with other folks within your team."

For the team captains and coaches, the experience also helps to build leadership skills, said Wesley Warren, captain of Team HRSD from the Virginia Water Environment Association. Pratt said the challenge is a remarkable training tool, and most people who have participated in the event at the team level have had great opportunities to advance in their careers.

Interacting with operators from other facilities also lends itself to cross-training among the contestants, according to Paul Johnson, captain of the LA Wrecking Crew from the California Water Environment Association. "We don't have ultraviolet or ozone [disinfection systems] at our facility, but when you're at these conferences, you meet these other people who work with these systems, and you get a better understanding of them," Johnson said. Likewise, exploring the

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exhibition hall gives operators first-hand knowledge of new equipment available from manufacturers.

Want to Start a Team?

For plants considering an Operations Challenge team, start small, Warren advised. "We've had teams come to our state competition and just run a few

events to get started," he said. "Watch, learn, and talk to people about it."

Having support behind a team is the key for success, according to Dale Burrow, captain of the TRA CREWSers. "We've got management completely behind us. They're always at every competition, always rooting us on. We've got

everybody at the plant behind us. Without all of their help, there's no way we'd get where we're at," Burrow said.

"I believe that virtually every operator could find some benefit from this," said Steve Johnson, a member of the LA Wrecking Crew. "There is something you're going to learn when you do this."

WEFTEC®, Windy City Welcome Argentinean Team



Again this year, Operations Challenge included a team from South America. However, for all of the members of the Todo Terrenos from Argentina — Roberto Domingo Comercio, Fernando Daniel Fuxan (alternate), Sergio Adrian Guasquil, Eduardo Vicente Herrera, Walter Raul Lamanno, and Domingo Vicente Vidosevich — this was their first visit to Operations Challenge at WEFTEC®.

"It's a very important event for all of us because it's an incredible experience, especially that it is done here in the United States," the team said through a translator. "We're very proud that we have won our national competition in Argentina to earn our way here."

To welcome the team to Chicago, the Windy City Wizards from the Illinois Water Environment Association hosted

"You've really got to hand it to those guys. They did an incredible job of picking stuff up quickly and just running with it."

Ed Staudacher, coach of the Windy City Wizards

a practice session for the Todos Terrenos on the Saturday before the competition, according to Ed Staudacher, the Wizards' coach.

Argentina's equivalent to Operations Challenge is very different from the U.S. competition, Staudacher said.

The Wizards shared some of their routines for running the events with the Terrenos. "Each team has their own methods and strategies for doing things," Staudacher said. Watching someone else use the Wizards routines was strange, he said.

"You've really got to hand it to those guys. They did an incredible job of picking stuff up quickly and just running with it."

The Todo Terrenos said that one of the biggest challenges they faced in the competition is the language barrier. However, the two teams found that the competition provided a common ground.

"When they're telling a story, you can see by their body language exactly what happened to them. It's all stuff that has happened to you before in practice before like getting your foot caught on something," Staudacher said. "They'd all laugh, and next thing you know we're all laughing. And we'd say, 'I have no idea what they just said, but I know exactly what happened.'"

During the competition the Todos Terrenos drew large crowds to cheer them on in every event. "It was interesting to have a team from Argentina competing with us," Staudacher said. "I think it drew a lot of the other teams to see how they would do."



The Todo Terrenos (kneeling) from Argentina drew a large cheering section at Operations Challenge. The crowd included the Illinois Water Environment Association Windy City Wizards, who practiced with the Terrenos prior to the competition, as well as many other employees from the Metropolitan Water Reclamation District of Greater Chicago.

DANIEL WENDT