

Dealers Unite

By Elizabeth Lisican

Water Quality Assn. (WQA) Dealer Section Chair Bret Tangley describes dealers as the “lifeblood” of the association. So it makes sense that the WQA’s Dealer Section is one of its strongest, most attended and most effective section groups. “For instance, there are so many more dealer members than there are manufacturers; so we’ve had a very nice section,” he said. “We’ve gotten some things accomplished that have been very positive.”

WQA Dealer Section provides valuable venue for education and networking

In fact, there are approximately 1,600 dealer companies within WQA’s membership. On average, about 75 to 100 dealers attend two formal meetings each year, both at the association’s mid-year and annual conferences.

“Then we probably have another two to four conference calls a year where the leaders of the dealer section get together and talk about pertinent issues or upcoming events or upcoming training,” Tangley said. “Our leadership gets together about six times a year, formally.”

WQA section meetings are open to all members in a particular line of business. Members in each section identify the key issues of concern.

Each of the sections then reports to the Board of Governors and Directors, where their issues and priorities are studied. The Board of Governors and Directors then create the association’s budget and allocate resources to the most essential industry priorities.

In addition to Tangley, the Dealer Section’s leadership includes three other members who constitute the section panel: Joel Huemann, Stanley Fauth and David Hawkins.

“My responsibilities are really to be the liaison between the section and the board of governors and board of directors and it’s to be a channel of

communication, two-way,” Tangley said. “This gives the dealers at large an opportunity to come to a section meeting and provide input that can shape the leadership, the direction, decision-making initiatives that the WQA works on or is concerned about. My job is to lead and make sure that we’re being available that we’ve got pertinent, relevant topic matter to talk about to make ourselves accessible.”

Share, Learn and Grow

The Dealer Section is a place to get familiarized with the issues of the day, formulate relationships and leadership and to learn the inner workings of the WQA.

“Dealers love to learn from other dealers, so I think we’ve done a good job,” Tangley said. “We have excellent businesspeople in that section who have a lot to share and they’re eager to learn. And so those two things combined are a great marriage.”

Tangley also said the section emphasizes timeliness and selects topics that are real to dealers every day in the business: for instance, how to work with a banker or how to “incentivize” employees.

“This year, at the [Aquatech USA 2010] convention we [covered] meaningful ways to incentivize

your employees for a job well done,” Tangley said. “We had a very good section about how to provide incentive plans and programs for employees to improve productivity and their performance.

“We’ve had great initiatives. We wrote the document that requested the soaps survey study that’s being now performed about quantifying the benefits of conditioned water and quantifying how much soap savings you’d have.”

Scientific Services, a New York-based research company, currently is measuring the benefits of soap savings by using softened water in dishwashers and in laundry applications.

“The Phase I portion of it is done so we think that by the mid-year meeting of 2010, or for sure by Aquatech 2011, we will have the final results and papers and the findings of the benefits.”

In fact, Tangley continued, the Dealer Section was also heavily involved in driving the Battelle study on the benefits of removal of water hardness from a water supply because the section needed that information.

“Much of what the association does is done through its dealers,” he said. “The manufacturers are a vibrant part of our association but they make products that eventually have to be sold through dealers in many cases. I think the dealers are the closest aspect of the business to the public to the purchaser to the consumer. So I think that’s a good reason why it’s successful. It has very good businesspeople in it and those businesspeople want to share, learn and grow.”

The Dealer Section is a place where WQA leaders are cultivated. In fact, it helped Tangley himself rise through the ranks with the association. Tangley, president of Sterling Water, Inc., dba



Culligan of Eau Claire, Wis., also serves as the WQA's governor-at-large.

"I was asked to serve [as Dealer Section chair] by a previous chair of the committee, Dennis Rupert, who was past president of WQA," Tangley said. "It was really one of the first entries I had to being more involved in the WQA as a whole."

Make Connections

Tangley said the Dealer Section is a unique way for dealers in similar regions to network—it is also one of the best ways for them to do so, he said.

"You meet people in the same business who may be in your state and in your region, and you also get a chance to network with the leaders of the association," he said.

While Dealer Section meetings are an invaluable tool for networking, Tangley noted that there are a multitude of other ways dealers can hone their networking skills every day. He emphasized making introductions and visits with vendors and suppliers, arranging meetings with local and regional competitors and joining with civic associations in the industry and community.

"Leverage any friends, partners or vendors to introduce yourself," he said. "Also, attend state, regional and national industry association meetings and conventions."

The Dealer Section as a whole plans to do some networking itself. According to Tangley, there have been talks of creating partnerships with other associations, such as the National Groundwater Assn.

"Are there potential partnerships and relationships that could be fostered and developed that would be in the collective interest of both associations? One of the long-term goals of the section is to see if there are strategic partnerships that could be forged that could help the section, the association and the other partner as well," Tangley said.

Stay Tuned

The next opportunity for dealers to converge at a Dealer Section meeting will arrive during the WQA

Mid-Year Leadership Conference in Ellicott City, Md., from Oct. 6 to 8, 2010. The educational topic has yet to be determined.

"It's a great opportunity for dealers and dealer members to get involved and to learn and share and grow with others," Tangley said. "There's a lot of exchange, and I've never met a person in the Dealer Section who wasn't

ready to share their insights or to learn something." *wqp*

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