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Pipe Chatter

Official publication of the South Dakota Association of Plumbing-Heating-Cooling Contractors, Inc.

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January 17, 2020
Rapid City & Sioux Falls

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February 27-28, 2020
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President’s Message

The older I get the faster the months and years seem to go. Here we are...it’s the first part of November already. Where has the year gone?

Last month I mentioned that our National PHCC annual convention (CONNECT2019) was taking place in Indianapolis, Indiana, October 2-4 and I planned to go. Indianapolis is a great city. I happen to have two kids and two grandkids that live there. So, it was an added bonus for me.

CONNECT 2019 started on October 2nd and it hit the ground running. It included 3 days filled with seminar opportunities in just about every area of our industry. There was something for everybody - whether you were a field technician, business accountant, estimator, project manager, or business owner.

I was especially proud of the two apprentices from South Dakota that competed in the national apprentice contest. Matt Warne, from Warne Plumbing & Heating in Watertown competed in the plumbing division and Zack Semmler, from Midwestern Mechanical in Sioux Falls, competed in the HVAC division. They both did a great job and represented SD well.

For me, I mostly look forward to the excellent networking that takes places at CONNECT. You can talk with people from all over the country that are dealing with many of the same challenges that we face here in SD everyday. People want to talk about their challenges and what they are doing to address them.

In my opinion, you can’t put a price on how valuable networking can be. I realize that most of us can’t leave our jobs or businesses for a week and travel 1000 miles to attend a national convention. But you’re going to have a hard time convincing me that you can’t get away for 2 days and come to our SDAPHCC state convention.

It’s like a miniature national convention.

We always bring in a professional educator to provide training on areas that we think our members are interested in. Plus, we have a few social events like the lunches and the trade show.

The convention is an opportunity to network with plumbing professional from all across the state of SD. Between the contractors and the vendors, you will likely see people you’ve known or worked with for years. You may even get a chance to put a face to a name that you’ve been very familiar with for years.

I guarantee that you will meet some of the nicest and best people that our state has to offer. Plus, you’ll develop some great friendships that only get stronger year after year.

Get involved with the SDAPHCC. It might just provide the key you needed to take your business to the next level. So plan to attend our SDAPHCC State Convention on Feb 27 & 28, 2020 at the Deadwood Lodge in Deadwood, SD. I look forward to seeing you there!

-Tom Hines, SDAPHCC 2019 President

PS. What I didn’t tell you is that I decided to ride my Harley to Indy. My trip lasted 16 days and 2400 miles. Along the way I visited Nebraska, Iowa, Kansas, Arkansas, Missouri, Tennessee, and Kentucky. Next month, I’ll share a few of the adventures we had.
SD Apprentices Compete at CONNECT 2019

Two apprentices from South Dakota recently competed in the National PHCC Apprentice Contest held at in Indianapolis, IN.

Matt Warne, from Warne Plumbing and Heating in Watertown, participated in the Plumbing Contest and Zack Semmler, from Midwestern Mechanical in Sioux Falls, participated in the HVAC contest.

The competition was held on October 2nd & 3rd on the tradeshow floor during the PHCC—National Association’s CONNECT 2019 event. A total of nineteen plumbing and ten HVAC apprentices from across the nation took part in the contests.

The HVAC competitors were required to complete a written test, demonstrate proper brazing techniques and perform a hands-on diagnostic on an HVAC package unit, with system errors created by the Foundation’s contractor volunteers for the competition. The competitors also had to perform a pressure and leak test, demonstrate proper refrigerant recovery procedures and the ability to accurately take a variety of instrument readings.

The plumbing apprentices were required to rough-in a bathroom system. The set-up includes a toilet, sink and shower, complete with supply, waste and vent lines, plus cleanouts and extra features designed to test the contestants’ knowledge and skills. The test set-up includes a variety of pipe materials – cast iron, copper, PVC and PEX, and corresponding joining methods.

A dedicated team of contractor volunteers arrived two days before the competitions to assemble the competitor test benches, distribute the materials and supplies and setup the testing areas. They monitor the competitions, evaluate the apprentices’ work and provide constructive feedback on each competitor’s performance following the event.

The contests are made possible by the generous support of several industry sponsors who provide monetary support and in-kind material and tool donations. Sponsors for the 2019 competition include, with headline sponsors appearing in bold: AB&I Foundry; AHRI; A.O. Smith; Bradford White Corp.; BrassCraft Manufacturing Co.; Chemours, Copper Development Association, Inc.; Delta Faucet Co.; Emerson; IAPMO, Kohler Company; Mechanical Hub Media; Milwaukee Tool; North American Technician Excellence (NATE); NIBCO INC.; Oatey; PHCC-National Auxiliary, Reed Manufacturing Co.; Rheem; RIDGID;
State Water Heaters; Tyler Pipe & Coupling; Viega, LLC; and Zoeller Pump Company

Milwaukee Tool made a major contribution to the Apprentice Contests this year by donating most of the tools needed by the contestants for the competition. This gift allowed the competitors to skip the trouble of shipping their own tools and to go home with a new set of tools to power their work long after the competition ends.

“I’m proud that we can present this opportunity for the apprentices to show off their skills,” reports Foundation Chair Craig Lewis. “The contests give these participants a chance to get away from home, be a part of a national event and see that how much support all of us in the industry are putting behind their success. It can be the experience of a lifetime. I am so thankful for the sponsors and the hard work put in by our volunteer committee members and staff in pulling it all together in a new exhibit hall every year.”

While the apprentices from South Dakota didn’t place in the top three, they learned a lot, made new connections, and had an amazing experience.
New HVAC Hands-On Competition Added

The SDAPHCC is excited to announce a new feature to the state Apprentice Contest. A hands-on competition for HVAC apprentices will be added to the state contest in 2020.

In the past, HVAC apprentices only completed a written test with the top scorer advancing to the national competition.

This year, the HVAC apprentices will first compete in the written test. Then the apprentices with the top three scores will advance to a hands-on competition at the state convention. The apprentice who scores the highest at the state convention, will win a trip to compete in the national competition at PHCC’s CONNECT in Dallas, TX.

Apprentice Contest information and entry forms will be mailed to all SDAPHCC contractor members in mid-November. Written tests will be administered in Sioux Falls and Rapid City on January 17th for both plumbing and HVAC apprentices. The hands-on competition for both groups will be held on February 27 at the annual state convention in Deadwood.

Apprentices must be 2nd year apprentices or higher and employed by a PHCC member. Plumbing apprentices must also be registered with the South Dakota Plumbing Commission. The registration deadline is December 27, 2019.
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PHCCCONNECT2019: Energetic, Excited Crowd... Equipped and Ready to Go!

By Staff Writer, PHCC-National Association

After the Checkered Flag
They may have waved the checkered flag during the closing event at the Indy 500 Speedway – signaling the end of their time in Indianapolis, Indiana – but the more than 900 attendees at PHCCCONNECT2019 returned home excited to start their business engines equipped with valuable takeaways from PHCC’s three-day Conference and Product & Technology Showcase.

The importance of keeping up with technology, analyzing data, planning for the future, protecting public health and safety, and maintaining professionalism in the industry resonated repeatedly throughout the Westin Indianapolis and Indiana Convention Center, where plumbing, heating and cooling contractors came eager to learn from the experts and share information with their peers during 22 educational opportunities.

Co-located with the 2019 RSES Conference & HVACR Technology Expo, the event – which included more than 140 exhibitors – offered numerous opportunities to learn about new products and practices. The Radiant Professionals Alliance also hosted a special education track on the latest hydronic and radiant heating and cooling technologies.

With several industry partners conveniently located at the Crossroads of America, PHCC leveraged its time in Indy with a behind-the-scenes look at the Delta Faucet Design Center, where attendees experienced the research and development practices behind Delta’s innovative design and technologies. In addition, Chemours offered a tour of its newly opened Training and Technical Support Center.

As testament to Indiana’s famous Hoosier Hospitality, PHCC of Indiana welcomed their guests with an inspiring video about how their members work together to better the industry, grow their own businesses and ensure professionalism in all they do. “Local chapters are your teammates and cheerleaders,” said one member. Forecasting the next three days at PHCCCONNECT2019, PHCC of Indiana’s Brad Isley predicted: “You’ll come for a convention, but you’ll leave with an experience.”

Among those experiences was a PHCC Political Action Committee (PAC) event at the Dallara Indycar Factory, where attendees had the opportunity to sit behind the wheel of a race car simulator, enjoy drinks and dinner, and learn about Dallara’s history, the IndyCar design process, vehicle dynamics and more.

Start Your Engines ... and Don’t Let Up on the Gas
Coincidentally, the need for speed inspired by the locale translated inside the conference halls as well. During a packed session on Succession Planning, for example, attendees were encouraged to set their personal feelings aside and “start the conversation now” on their futures, including examining different methods to accurately value their businesses to prepare for the sale or transfer to the next generation.

Weaving throughout many of the sessions was the importance of gathering and analyzing data and the crucial need to keep up with
technology. PHCC illustrated that right on site, using online polling for the first time in some sessions at PHCCCONNECT2019, including a panel discussion on unfair utility competition.

During the Opening Breakfast, Bradford White CEO Bruce Carnevale stressed the company’s own commitment to innovation ... as well as to American manufacturing and industry tradespeople. “Change drives innovation, and innovation drives change,” he said, focusing on key changes in the industry such as BIM, augmented reality, artificial intelligence, green construction, eCommerce, connected products and the Internet of Things (IoT).

“It’s not all about the products but also about the people in the organization,” Carnevale added. To stay ahead of the change, the PHCC Strategic Partner is putting the finishing touches on a new R&D lab and hiring new people to further expand the company’s business intelligence and IoT capabilities. Carnevale encouraged PHCC members to take advantage of the association’s educational opportunities, bring more professionals into the fold, and leverage opportunities – such as Bradford White’s For the Pro® program – from PHCC partners and other industry manufacturers.

During his Oct. 4 keynote address – “Managing in an Uncertain Economy” – economist Connor Lokar also prompted attendees to “listen to the data points and move from reactive to proactive.” Assessing today’s economic situation, Lokar described it as “bending, but not breaking.” “Things are going to get a little worse before they get better, and it’s going to be scary,” he said. “Don’t panic. Yes, things are going to slow down, but they will get better.”

Lokar guided audience members on how to manage the business cycle to maximize their profits. “It is important to know where you are relative to the general economic trend,” which he predicted will be marked by decelerating growth through the rest of the year before showing growth in 2021. Of note, the participants learned how to use rate-of-change calculations to learn where they are in the business cycle and how to identify key leading indicators that will steer their business decisions in areas like cash management and inventory control.

“I Bring Value to Society. I’m a Plumber.”
In a patriotic nod, Bo DeAngelo, manager of technical training for Viega, underscored the PHCC Corporate Partner’s commitment to the education and upward mobility of the contractor profession. “PHCC fights for the tradespeople who fought for our country,” he said, comparing the loyalty to that for our country’s veterans, before introducing keynote speaker Richard Trethewey on Oct. 3.

Sharing some stories that he admitted he “couldn’t tell on TV,” Richard Trethewey, a fourth-generation plumber best known from the Emmy Award-winning home improvement show “This Old House,” shared his passion for elevating awareness of the trades and filling the skilled worker gap. “If you have had a great career, a great life, and have something to give back, adopt one kid,” he said of connecting a young person with a job in the trades. “Please celebrate getting kids in the industry.”

Trethewey has worked with “This Old House’s” Generation NEXT program to encourage young people to consider professions in the construction trades. Also, “don’t overlook the veterans,” he told the CONNECT audience. “Find someone with a good work ethic.”

Recognizing that often it is difficult for trained contractors and technicians to explain the technical aspects of plumbing and HVAC to customers, Trethewey offered this advice: “In our industry, we are all very smart yet try to talk down to the consumer. We don’t talk to them...You’re professional business people. Articulate to them that you know what to do.”