

By Jeff Sober

## Texas teams place in both Division I and II

The Water Environment Association of Texas was proud to send three teams to the 25th Annual National Operations Challenge Competition in New Orleans, LA. Representing the State of Texas were the Texas State Champions, the Trinity River Authority of Texas CREWSers, the State Runner Ups, the Austin Dillo Xpress, and the Dallas AquaTechs.

Operations Challenge is a five event competition that pits teams of four against each other to race for the fastest time. The events are timed and penalties can be added for mistakes or shortcuts during the runs. The events include: The Laboratory Event, where teams simulate completing a BOD test; the Process Control Event, which is a pencil and paper test; The Maintenance Event, where teams race to complete maintenance on a submersible pump and mixer; the Collections Event, a simulation of repairing an in-service pipe; and the Safety Event, where teams recover a downed colleague from a confined space area.

After making the trip from Texas to New Orleans, the teams settled into nice accommodations along the famed Bourbon Street. This year, the AquaTechs had two new team members, which moved them from Division I down to Division II. The Dillo Xpress and the CREWSers competed again in Division I.

First up in the 2012 Operations Challenge competition was the process control test. The style of test this year was different than last, and the scoring range was an unknown to the teams until after the event. Following Process was Laboratory. All the teams went into the lab event with confidence from weeks of practice. All three teams finished the lab events with times that were slower than expected. When asked about the competition times being slower than their average practice runs back home, CREWSers Captain Dale Burrow stated: "You know each event so well by the time you reach nationals that you can play them back in your head over and over with the day's mistakes standing out like a sore thumb."

The second day of competition is usually considered the most exciting, because all the physical events take place. The teams rotate through the maintenance, safety, and collection system events. This year, the buzz in Division I was regarding the increase in competition between all the teams. When asked about the biggest difference between last year and this year, Ellery Studivant, Coach of the Dillo Xpress, said: "I think that the focus level of the competitors this year was amazing." With two teams in Division 1 and one team in Division II, WEAT had the opportunity to bring a lot of trophies home. When the dust settled for each of the individual events, TRA and Austin

could only claim one spot, when the TRA CREWSers placed Second in the Lab event, with a time three seconds from first place! TRA rounded out its performance with a fourth place finish in Safety, Process, and Collections, and sixth place finish in Maintenance. Austin had hard earned fifth place finishes in Lab and Maintenance, and respectable 7th, 8th, 9th, place in Process, Safety, and Collections.

With only one top three finish out of five events, the CREWSers did not expect to place in the Overall standings. As told by Dale Burrow, Team Captain: "As each event was called out at the awards ceremony, and the 'CREWSers' only walked up for a second place on the lab event, we started to rule out a top three overall spot by this point." To everyone's surprise, TRA once again proved that consistency is key and was awarded the third place overall prize for Division I. When asked about the surprise third place finish, Captain Dale stated: "With all the ups and downs we had this day, being able to carry home another third place trophy felt pretty good after thinking you had no chance to place at all." TRA has placed third or higher in 12 of the last 14 national competitions, earning their spot as a Operations Challenge powerhouse.

Although Austin did not place in the top three in Division I, they plan on buckling down and coming back stronger next year. When asked about next year's plans, Coach Studivant



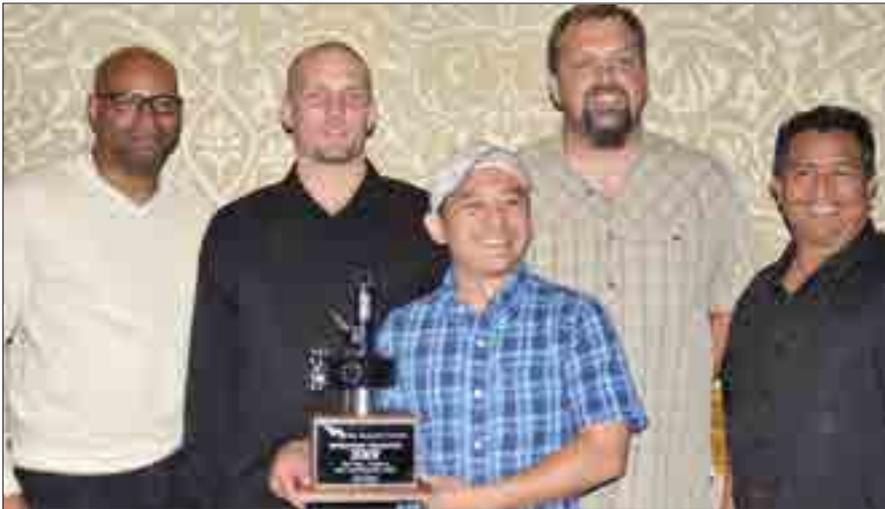
AquaTechs competing in the Maintenance Event



TRA CREWSers took 2nd in the Laboratory Event



The Dallas AquaTechs took 2nd place in the Collections Event



The Dallas AquaTechs showing their First Place Maintenance hardware



TRA CREWSers took 3rd Overall in Division 1



The Dallas AquaTechs with their 3rd place overall finish



Jason Crawley walks the Safety Event platform before judging

stated: “[We] plan on preparing for the competition a month earlier than normal, and spending a lot more time on process [control event].”

In Division II, The Dallas AquaTechs had an amazing showing. The team started the year with significant setbacks and hurdles. One member of the team became very ill right before competition. The most veteran member of the team, Rey Davila, became the coach. Two new members joined, which moved Dallas from Division I to Division II. Dallas came out of the shoots with an amazing first place win in the Maintenance Event. When asked about the emotion from the first place win, Coach Rey Davila said: “It was a mixture of feelings, [me] coaching the team for the first time and training with two new team members; trying to get them ready in one week for a National competition was a big challenge.” Not only did Dallas come through with a first place win, but they also took second in Collections. These two big wins were enough to pull up the 13th and 14th place in Process and Laboratory, respectively, and combined with a 5th place in Safety to give the AquaTechs a surprise third

place overall in Division II. When asked about plans for next year, Coach Rey exclaimed: “I am going to work hard to build a strong team with an excellent competition spirit. They will be good, I promise you!”

Several WEAT members participated as Judges at the National Competition. These members include, State Collection System Judges Rick Johnson and Roger Cagle, State Exhibition Event Coordinator John Kauffman, Previous National Laboratory Coordinator Bill Cyrus, State Laboratory Judge Mary Evans (and Future National Laboratory Event Coordinator!), State Maintenance Event Coordinator Jared Schermse, State Maintenance Event Judge Megan Martin, State Safety Event Judge Jason Crawley, and State Operations Challenge Coordinator Jeff Sober.

The success of this year’s Operations Challenge program can be summarized by quoting Dale Burrow again: “I think Texas had one of its most successful years”, he stated, and followed up with this list:

1. We had four teams at our state competition this year.
2. Two Texas [WEAT Members] and two California team members had the honor of representing the United States in WEF’s first ever international team which competed in Buenos Aries, Argentina.
3. A Texas all-star team made up of two TRA, one Dallas, and one Austin team member won first overall at an Atlantic City’s Invitational competition.
4. The ‘CREWSers’ took first place overall at an Ocean City Invitational competition.
5. TRA hosted teams training from Arkansas, Louisiana, Dallas, and Austin.
6. Dallas and TRA hosted and helped train a team from Buenos Aries, Argentina.
7. TRA finished 3rd overall in Division I and Dallas finished 3rd overall in Division II at WEF’s national competition.
8. Texas has a new Laboratory Event National Coordinator – Mary Evans.



TRA CREWSers took 3rd Overall in Division 1

## OPERATIONS CHALLENGE SECTION

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# Mary Evans becomes WEF national operations challenge laboratory event coordinator



Mary Evans, a long time member of WEF, was named the new National Operations Challenge Laboratory Event Coordinator, effective for the 2013 competition year. This is a huge success for the Texas Operations Challenge program and a large volunteer commitment from Mary. Evans has been

the Texas Laboratory Event Coordinator and now will step into the national spotlight as she will coordinate the national laboratory competition for over 45 teams! All of WEAT applauds her efforts to make it to this level.

Mary is currently employed by Premier Magnesia, LLC as South Central Regional Account Manager, and was previously employed by City of Tyler and Tyler Pipe Industries. She is also a licensed Class A Wastewater Operator. She has been engaged in environmental work since 1975, and a WEF Member since 1987. Her role as the National Coordinator adds to her long list of accomplishments, including: Past WEAT President, Section Representative, Public Education Chair, Scholarship Committee Member, Laboratory Committee Member, WEF Public Education Committee Member, WEF SJWP Committee Member, WEF Bedell Award Winner, Recipient of WEAT Leadership Award, Laboratory Analyst Award and TWUA Public Education Award.



Mary congratulates the TRA CREWSers on their 3rd place finish overall

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