



# WORK FOR WATER

## Filling the People Pipeline in Virginia

By Robert Forgione, PE, Vice-Chair W4W Committee

The Work for Water (W4W) Committee was formed in 2010 to enhance the visibility and image of available careers in the water/wastewater industry. We help Virginia water and wastewater utilities work together to ensure a continuous supply of qualified people to join the ranks of our staff. Our committee is holding a series of workshops around the state to help raise awareness of these efforts among utility human resource staff and utility management.

Building on the success of our May, 2011 workshop in northern Virginia, we held our latest workshop in central Virginia on November 9, 2011. The Hanover County Public Utilities Department hosted the workshop at their James T. Bruce Center in Mechanicsville. Representatives from eight water/wastewater utilities, several consulting firms, the Virginia Department of Health, the Virginia Employment Commission and a community college attended.

**Bob Canova**, W4W Committee Chair, kicked off the workshop with a discussion of the committee and the numerous employment and education resources in Virginia that can be tapped for potential hires. He also reviewed the W4W tabletop exhibit which is available from the

committee to VWEA and VA AWWA members to use at local school career days.

Our second speaker, **M. Talmadge Harris**, Regional Business & Economic Development Specialist for the Virginia Employment Commission (VEC), discussed the VEC programs and demonstrated their interactive employment website. Potential employees can list their availability online so employers may seek candidates for available positions. Alternatively, potential employers may list their openings on the site free of charge (see <https://www.vawc.virginia.gov/>). The W4W Committee encourages utilities to use the VEC website to post open positions and recommends that employers use the word "water" in the titles of their job postings in order to foster more efficient searches by applicants.

Following a networking break, **Karen L. Ebert**, MPA, Training Coordinator for Newport News Waterworks, discussed the Hampton Roads Public Works Academy. The academy is a joint program of its utility members and their educational institution partners. Founded in the late 1990s, the academy provides a cadet program and employee training in addition to providing for member networking. The cadet program provides training and intern

opportunities for high school juniors and seniors. It exposes them to the utility industry, teaches them needed work skills and promotes a good work ethic. Cadets have gone on to become valued employees of member utilities. The academy provides shared training opportunities for existing utility employees allowing, for example, for costly out-of-town training to be brought to the local area at considerable cost savings for training budgets. For more information on this program please see [www.hrpwa.org](http://www.hrpwa.org).

Following the formal presentations, **Kathi Mestayer**, W4W Committee member, led an open discussion on recruiting for our industry. Workshop participants actively engaged in numerous discussions on topics of common interest, going well beyond our intended workshop end time.

To learn more:

Visit [www.vwea.org](http://www.vwea.org). Hover over "Committees," scroll to "Work for Water" and click on "Work for Water Past News/Events." Here you will find links to the May 2011 and November 2011 workshop presentations. We hope to add this to the VA AWWA site soon. ▼