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Kurt Pitts  
Acting Team Leader Infrastructure Services  
Baw Baw Shire Council  
PO Box 304  
WARRAGUL VIC 3820  
03 5624 2485 0427 556 646

I was recently lucky enough to be successful in obtaining sponsorship from the Municipal Engineering Foundation (MEF), Victoria to attend the 2013 IPWEA International Public Works Conference in Darwin. The conference ran from Sunday evening until Thursday afternoon. It was a well structured conference consisting of a very good mix of networking events and technical sessions.

In keeping with the important conference theme "Explore New Territory", I took the opportunity to share the experience with my family and invited my wife and eighteen month old son up with me. They were able to share the welcome reception and under 30's welcome events on the Sunday evening at Crocosaurus Cove with me, where my son was fascinated with the crocodiles swimming around in the large tanks. During the remainder of the conference, they enjoyed their time together, often visiting me for lunch, and exploring new territory of their own. Following the conference, we were able to spend time together visiting the many tourist sites in and around Darwin, as well as spending time relaxing by the pools and waterholes, while my son enjoyed throwing rocks in the shallow rock pools. We were able to visit Litchfield National Park which was simply stunning; and refreshing after a dip under the waterfalls. We visited museums and learnt a lot about the Bombing of Darwin. We were also able to explore the many markets Darwin has to offer, particularly the famous Mindil Beach Sunset Market which was an incredible market set on one the most stunning backdrops I have seen.

The conference structure was well set out, with a light breakfast supplied daily, allowing delegates the opportunity to network and visit exhibitors each morning. There were also thirty minute morning tea and afternoon tea breaks and a generous ninety minute lunch break, again allowing further networking opportunities. I took great advantage of these opportunities to network with friends and colleagues I already know, but more importantly to meet new people and gain connections through the field.

The evening events were fantastic opportunities to get to know other delegates in a different setting, and relax after a big day of technical information. These events lived up to their reputation and did not fail to impress! The Under 30's Welcome Reception and the Welcome Reception, both held at Crocosaurus Cove in Darwin's CBD were great to break the ice and get to know some delegates I may not have met before. The Experience Darwin Dinner at the SkyCity Casino was an incredible experience with a backdrop to rival some of the best sunset photographs. While, to wrap up the conference, the Gala Dinner produced a level of entertainment which will prove difficult to match.

The social aspect was fantastic. It was good to see so many young people in attendance. Young IPWEA members as well as other younger engineers at the conference got together regularly. A group of us got together on Tuesday at lunchtime for a wave pool session, while other nights a group of us got together to have a casual drink or two together. It was great to be able to build a network of young people to keep in touch with throughout my career.

It was fantastic to see that Young IPWEA received well deserved recognition at the conference. I thoroughly enjoyed the panel session with the three young female engineers working in rural areas, Melanie Giacomini, Rebecca Clothier and Jo O'Brien. I found this session very valuable and I'm sure other delegates learnt a lot from it also. This panel session followed Keynote speaker Kim Seeling Smith's presentation: "Viva La Revolution! The 5 C's of Employee Recruitment, Engagement and Retention that will revolutionise the ability of your organisation to attract and retain talent in today's

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social age.” Kim’s presentation was fantastic, very fascinating and valuable. I particularly liked her chart referring to the squeaky wheels, fat middle and critical people within an organisation, along with learning about the 5 C’s and what they can do to improve my organisation.

There were some fantastic technical sessions during the conference, I particularly enjoyed David Nixon’s “100 Trends Affecting Public Works Engineering in Australia” and Richard Parkinson & Chris McGuire’s “Exploring the Unknowns – Designing for Resilience Where the only Constant is Change.” There were many other very good presentations worthy of a mention but there were just too many to list. I was able to pick up some valuable information from some of the presentations to use on my return to work.

There was a wide range of exhibitors to visit while on breakfast, morning tea, lunch and afternoon tea breaks. To have these breaks in the same hall as the exhibitors worked very well in allowing delegates to visit the exhibitors while enjoying their food. I was able to pick up a good amount of information from exhibitors which I was able to take back to Baw Baw Shire with me and share with my colleagues. Some of the innovative products were fantastic and I have already introduced one of these to our urban maintenance team so that they have a safer, more convenient manhole on one of our newly installed pump stations. I brought back a large pile of product brochures and information for my team to browse through also.

The most valuable part of the conference for me was the networking opportunities, being able to meet as many new people as possible and learning what I can from their experience. I’d like to summarise some of the benefits to encourage other municipalities to send their young engineers along to similar events as follows:

- Networking benefits
- Updated information on key issues affecting the industry
- Allow delegates to interact with other delegates who may be experiencing similar issues and problems in their organisation
- Access to key research and latest information
- Opportunities to explore the sights and sounds of Darwin and surrounds
- Newest and most innovative products on display
- Opportunity to win prizes from the exhibitors
- Sharing of good ideas between delegates

I’d also like to add that I feel it is important when selecting a table for the dinners, that a table is selected where few, and preferably none of the people on that table are known to me. I have always found this to be a very successful method of getting to know people and adding to the important networking experience.

I am looking forward to the opportunity to attend the 2015 IPWEA International Public Works Conference in Rotorua, New Zealand, in conjunction with the IFME World Congress. I will be encouraging Baw Baw Shire to send several delegates along. I encourage all young engineers to attend this conference and truly believe as far as networking experiences go, the IPWEA International conferences can’t be beaten.

I would like to sincerely thank the Municipal Engineering Foundation of Victoria for the opportunity to attend such a fantastic and well organised conference.

Thank you.