

## Operators Without Borders Year End Update 2020

As 2020 comes to an end I think most of us are holding our breath and hoping that it won't be too far into 2021 that COVID cases start dwindling and a safe vaccine becomes available.

It has been quite a year to say the least. I was in South Carolina waiting to make a presentation to the Water Association there when it was cancelled the day of! I had just come from a conference on Lessons Learned from Hurricane Dorian where I presented the accomplishments of OWB. From there I was the last presenter to the South East Florida Utilities Group before COVID closed everything down. Our thanks to a great partner Kevin Carter from Broward County, Florida who set up Caribbean One Water and has been a tireless supporter of OWB. With the cancellation of the SC conference I hopped the best flight I could to get back to BC and arrived two days before Canadians were advised to come back immediately.

**Adapting our Services & Programs.** When COVID started appearing as a big threat we had a team from Ohio set to travel to Grand Bahamas to continue helping the water utility there post-Dorian, as well as Ron Enns set to leave the next day to deliver safety training in Antigua. We had no problem getting our volunteers there but getting them back was considered too risky as borders started to close. So we scrambled and made last minute cancellations – along with half the world and half day waits on hold trying to get through to the airlines. In the end I went to the airport when I arrived back in BC and cancelled everything there!



*Figure 1 Marsh Harbour Abaco was totally destroyed OWB deployed 5 teams to Grand Bahamas post Hurricane Dorian*

COVID hampered our ability to send volunteers



*Figure 2 Ron Enns leading a training webinar*

to deliver in country programme. But our Board swung into action. We repositioned our capacity building efforts to deliver training online. We have worked in partnership primarily with the Caribbean Water and Sewerage (CAWASA) since that time. We express our thanks to Ignatius Jean their Executive Director and a long-ime friend from St Lucia for working so closely with us. In conjunction with CAWASA we have, since May, put on many webinars and training session that have all been very well received. The following webinars were delivered and we thank each of the presenters for both their time and excellence of their presentations:

Ron Enns – Safety Training; Disaster Management lessons learned from Hurricane Katrina; and Occupational Health & Safety

Greg Solecki and Ian Mcilwham – Disaster Within a Disaster



Mike Ippen – Preventative Maintenance

Carl Yates – Water Loss Control

Neal Klassen – Conservation and Communication



Figure 3: Greg Solecki delivering ICS training people to Caribbean water operators

We were very fortunate this year to have Greg Solecki, one of Canada's foremost disaster experts volunteer time with OWB. Greg has been involved, and in many cases, led Canada's response to all disasters over the last 14 years. He is an Incident Commander and qualified to teach all levels of Incident Command Systems both in Canada and by FEMA in the US. In conjunction with CAWASA Greg delivered two Incident Command System Level I workshops with almost 200 participants. He also delivered one specifically for the Belize Water Services and has committed to more sessions in 2021.

As well as working with CAWASA, with whom we are in the process of signing an MOU, we also partnered with the Caribbean Water and Wastewater Association. Mike Ippen delivered a one-day workshop on *Preventative Maintenance*. It is a sorely needed process in the Caribbean where the majority of utilities likely work in reactive mode.

Training is often very expensive and quite difficult to obtain in the Caribbean in the quantity needed. OWB's goal is to work with the Associations, as well as directly with utilities to provide free training to improve the sustainability of the industry. The plus is that the work we do now to set up these relationships using online approaches can form part of our long-term offerings.

**Developing Our Organization.** On the administrative front there were some big wins. OWB was successful in obtaining Charitable Status in no small part by the efforts of our Secretary Madeleine Butschler who worked on the unenviable task of filling out all the forms and chasing government officials working from home to access our application in an emptied out office to make this happen. A huge vote of thanks to Madeleine.

Our Treasurer, Kalpna Solanki, took over the oversight of the website redevelopment. Signing up as a volunteer or member and donating to the cause can now all be done over our web portal. Thank you Kalpna to you, Heather Reynolds and Lachlan Manser from the EOCP for making these connections to each of our groups work.

The Board is also working under Madeleine's stewardship to ensure our bylaws and policies comply with the mandate that was approved with our Charitable status and that we comply with the bylaws and policies. All board members, along with Ian Mcilwham, Co-Chair of the Policy Development Guide Committee (ad hoc) and Carl Yates (inaugural Committee Member) have been writing policies on Operational Oversight, Health and Safety, Finance and Committee ToRs.



Someone once said bylaws are like sausages, we want and need them but nobody wants to know what goes in them! Very true words and a mundane, though necessary job. Thanks to all!

We have also been setting up committees to assist our Board. (Check out our Org Chart on the website.) We have a Deployment Committee on which volunteers Marcel Miscuraca and Jason Mank serve. They were deployed on disaster missions in both Dominica and Grand Bahamas. They will help evaluate the skills needed on future assignments where they will lead teams. We have also set up an Advisory Committee and are delighted that the following individuals have volunteered:

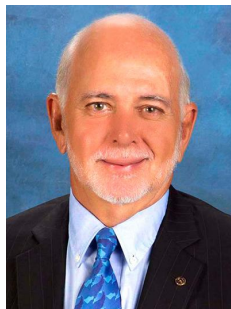
- Adrianus (Ton) Vlugman) recently retired from the Pan American Health Organization in Barbados who has spent most of his career working in the Caribbean on health and disasters. Ton knows just about everyone in Caribbean Regional organizations and will bring great insight .
- Patricia Aquing Past Executive Director of the Caribbean Water and Wastewater Association as well as the Caribbean Environmental Health Institute. Pat has worked tirelessly in the water and wastewater sector for many years and like Ton will bring her knowledge and contacts to assist OWB
- Greg Solecki is one of Canada's leading disaster experts and will be invaluable providing his expertise when we deploy post disaster. Greg has already given generously of his time to provide free Level I Incident Command System workshop in the Caribbean for OWB
- Kevin Carter is the dynamo behind OneWater Academy and the Caribbean One Water Conversation. He is Assistant to the Director of Broward County, Florida Water and Wastewater Services and has been helpful already with setting up presentations in Florida on behalf of OWB.

We welcome each to the Committee and look forward to their advice.

## HANWASH

*"Our dream is to bring potable water and good sanitation to the entire country of Haiti. Water is essential for good living conditions and the people of Haiti deserve to have it."*

– Barry Rassin  
Rotary International President 2018-19



A very exciting new project is our partnering with the Rotary HANWASH initiative in Haiti. Having worked in Haiti after the earthquake in 2010 and seen first hand the tremendous challenges faced in the country I wondered if anything could make a difference. The long-term commitment by Rotary to this project is a very bright light and one we are delighted to be a part. Board member Carl Yates along with Stephane Barbarie, who has the advantage of being a French speaker and Aisha Niang the Assistant Director – Water Wastewater Operations for the City of Houston Public

Works, Madeleine Butschler and I are working with the Haiti team on a pilot project in Pignon. The focus is to cut leakage by at least 30% (presently at 84%) and restore water service from wells that are either non-functional or have e-coli. Madeleine and Aisha are also working on Training



Manuals, SOPs and knowledge capture to build a sustainable practice and one that can be replicate as the project moves across Haitian communities over the next 10-20 years. I am itching for COVID to be over so we can send teams to help train and mentor local operators. I participate each week in the weekly Zoom call with members of Rotary across North America and I am very, very impressed by their systems, organization and dedication. It is also a delight to be working again with Neil Van Dine, who I met while there previously and who has resided for many years in Haiti. He is impressive with his knowledge and commitment.

One other important project in the works is assisting DOWASO the water authority in Dominica to set up a training programme for their new lab. Volunteers Ian Mcilwham and LeAnne Mcilwham both who work for the Region of Durham, are spearheading this initiative

I wish to thank all our volunteers and those who signed up as members this year. You are making a difference. A special thank you to Ron Enns who has given so much of himself to help put on courses and advise us on how to run Zoom training sessions, many of which he ran. Most of all I extend gratitude to OWB's wonderful Board of Directors without whom none of this would have happened. To Kalpna Solanki. Madeleine Butschler, Robert Haller and Carl Yates a heartfelt thank you.

In closing I wish each of you a very happy and blessed Christmas/Hanukkah/Diwali/Pancha Ganapati however, you are able to celebrate in this most abnormal time.

***Valerie Jenkinson***  
***Chair***