

SOJOURN TO BULGARIA

The Chesapeake Water Environment Association (CWEA) established a partnership in 1993 for the technical support of the newly formed Bulgarian National Association on Water Quality (BNAWQ) through the CWEA International subcommittee. Several exchange missions have taken place over the years in an effort to strengthen the partnership and exchange information.

It was on such an exchange visit to the US, late summer 2000, that members of the BNAWQ were introduced to the Delaware Center for Environmental Training (DCET) and Jerry Williams, the DCET director. The BNAWQ team of Dr. Atanas Paskalev, Dr. Grigori Michilov, and Dr. Roumen Arsov were impressed with what DCET had to offer in the way of operator training and requested further information. That information was transferred in person in a week of meetings and a conference presentation that took place the week of February 19th through the 23rd 2001 in Sofia, Bulgaria.

Several members of a DCET team completed the trip with CWEA regular Bulgarian subcommittee member, Alan Will, present. The DCET team consisted of Jerry Williams, DCET Director, Reinhold Betchel, Kent County (DE) assistant Public Works Director, Tony Digenakis, Del Tech International Training Specialist and Steve Rohm, DE DNREC and Del Tech Adjunct Instructor. The theme of CWEA's subcommittee, support of and partnership with BNAWQ, continued in this trip with an added offer made to the Bulgarian counterparts of partnering in the creation of an Environmental Training Center using the DECT template. Additionally, Jerry Williams and Steve Rohm were also slated presenters at **BNAWQ's 6th Annual Water Quality Conference** during the week.



The DCET/CWEA contingent Tony Digenakis , Vesselina Bakalov (interpreter) Jerry Williams, BNAWQ President Atanas Paskalev (background), Steve Rohm, Alan Will and BNAWQ Board Member, Mika (Dimitar Hadjiivanoff)

The DCET team arrived early in the evening of Saturday the 17th and was greeted by Tevetanka (Taz) Angelova, BNAWQ Board Member, and Niki, our driver (for the entire stay). No sooner did the team arrive when the first strategy meeting was under way with Taz and Dr. Atanas Paskalev, BNAWQ President. A busy agenda of meetings with principals of government, academia, labor and operations managers was scheduled for the week. The meetings would culminate in a final meeting with the Bulgarian Office of USAID where a unified plea for operator training funding for Bulgarian operators was to be made. The USAID meeting was a smashing success.

Sunday the 18th was not a day of rest by any means. Dr. Paskalev, an avid cross-country skier and mountain hiker, invited the DCET team for a leisurely hike to the summit of beautiful Mt. Vitosha. The 10 mile hike takes hikers to the beautiful snow capped Vitosha at roughly 6,200 feet. Hikers get a break, the hike starts at about the 1500 foot level. On this his 1010th ascent, Dr. Paskalev shortly left Jerry Williams and Steve Rohm in the dust (snow) only to meet them near the summit after they humbly rode the available chair lift up the mountain. The scenery was spectacular. What a way to get over jet lag. However the group had time to soothe their aching egos by enjoying a Bulgarian cuisine dinner hosted by our BNAWQ counterparts. Needless to say the food was as fantastic as the company.

The schedule became more serious on Monday morning with a meeting at the University of Architecture, Engineering and Geodesy in Sofia. Our interpreter for the week, Vasselina Bakalova, joined us prior to the meeting. Dean, Dr. Rouman Arsov and Dr. Grigor Mihailov US visitors from last summer listened to the DCET concept in detail. With prior exposure and the new information Arsov and Mihailov agreed that the University would be the academic partner with DCET in the possible creation of a Bulgarian environmental Training Center. This was an extremely important milestone.

A late morning meeting was hosted by the Department Chief of Water Supply and Sewerage, Mr. Plamen Nikiforov, in the Ministry of Regional Development and Public Works. He was enthusiastically agreeable with the possible establishment of a Bulgarian Center for the training of water and wastewater operations personnel and pledged his Department's support. We then met with Mr. Borislav Petrov, Assistant Ministry Director. He was quickly briefed in the small amount of time he could afford us. He pledged his Ministry's support and partnership in conjunction with the University's in support of DCET's proposal.

Still another meeting on Monday afternoon with Mr. Angel Malinov, an elected member of the Bulgarian Parliament, saw the DCET team accompanied by Dr. Paskalev, restate our proposal of partnering with the Bulgarian's in the establishment of an Environmental Training Center using the Del Tech model. He was informed of the previous meetings, the interest and support of the University and the Ministry, and Mr. Malinov became a partner as well. He pledged his support for the concept in the Bulgarian Parliament, which would soon convene, coincidentally, on some environmental regulation amendments.

And yet another quick meeting was to happen and did with Mr. Nikolai Kouyumdzhev, Head of the Water Protection Department, in the Ministry of Environment and Water. His and his Ministry's support was gained as well. The support of this Ministry is parallel to receiving the US EPA's support.

Tuesday's schedule was less rigorous, as was Wednesday's schedule. The group attended BNAWQ's conference, rubbing elbows with an international smattering of water and wastewater industry peers, trading information and sampling the fine regional luncheon cuisine. This is the part of the CWEA Bulgarian Subcommittee's mission that was enjoyed by all. Did I mention cocktail party?

Wednesday started off with our group leisurely in attendance of the Conference. However further meetings with Bulgarian officials loomed on the horizon. Later on Wednesday afternoon, Mr. Dimitar Hadjiivanoff (a.k.a. Mika), arranged a meeting with Mr. Peter DaFov, President of the National Water Supply Union. The DCET proposal was again delivered and again embraced. Mr. DaFov was particularly interested in the opportunity that such a training center would offer for career enrichment. Mr. DaFov pledged his and the Unions support and partnership for the concept .

The Conference continued on Thursday. Alan Will presented a plaque to Dr. Paskalev and BNWQA for their continuing efforts to support the water and wastewater industry. After the award, Jerry Williams and Steve Rohm delivered their presentation entitled *Wastewater Operator Certification and the Development of a Career Path for Wastewater Operators*. After a light lunch and post conference summary the event was concluded. Later in the afternoon, a meeting with Mr. Bob Gallienne and Mr. Georgi Faitondjiev of the Sofia Water Company was held. Sofia Water is a private corporation operating Sofia's water and wastewater facilities and infrastructure. Mr.

Gallienne and Mr. Faitondjiev also embraced the DCET proposal and pledged their company's support and partnership.



BNAWQ President Atanas Paskalev and Secretary Elaine

Friday, the end of a very busy week but not until an extremely important morning meeting with officials of the USAID Bulgarian office. Ms. Ivanka Tzankova and Mr. John Morgan, the USAID officials, were expecting to host several people with a simple proposal. However the DCET/CWEA/Bulgarian contingent filled the room with 20 partners. Needless to say the USAID officers were astounded by the overwhelming support and unification garnered for environmental training in such a short time. USAID seemed supportive of the DCET proposal as well and all left the meeting with a feeling of accomplishment. But this is only the beginning.

Perhaps we were gluttons for punishment but how could wastewater guys pass up a last minute tour of Sofia's wastewater treatment plant. Mika, made arrangements with Mr. Faitondjiev, the Facility Manager to give us a quick tour. Despite the apparent lack of aesthetic care and continued use of archaic equipment, the final effluent looked pretty good. Without adequate time to look at the entire facility it would be unfair to be judgmental. The facility is due for a planned upgrade.



Alan Will inspects one of the Sofia WWTP aeration basins

Friday evening ended with a farewell and thank you dinner hosted by the DCET/CWEA contingent for our Bulgarian hosts. Their hospitality and warmth for the entire week added to the joint accomplishments that were realized. The City of Sofia seemed alive with hope. It was inspiring to see buildings and other architecture in use that predates the discovery of America. The surrounding mountains offer a constant scenic outline of the history rich city. It is definitely a place to visit even if your not on business.

There is much work to be done in following up on the goals established in the visit. The Bulgarian partners, with DCET and CWEA assistance, must apply to USAID for the training center funding. The University of Sofia must prepare a plan for hosting a training center. Bulgarian environmental officials that support the effort must lobby their parliamentary officials to amend environmental law to require certification of operators. DCET must continue its efforts to provide intermediate exchange opportunities and coaching of the Bulgarian partners in using the DCET

model. This infant stage initiative could develop into an opportunity to provide a forum for training and technical exchange that not only works for the country of Bulgaria but may help lay the groundwork for the entire Eastern European region.