

Their Success Is Our Success: NYWEA's Scholarship Program Moves into the Next Phase of Its Campaign

by John D. Cameron, Jr. and Peter J. Radosta

Introduction

With the success of the first phase of the Scholarship Program behind us, NYWEA is now embarking upon a new and even more challenging phase. "Their Success is Our Success" (thanks to our Scholarship Committee co-chair, Al Lopez, for this title) is the theme of the new phase of the campaign.

Much like a good work of art, a well-coined phrase can mean many things to many people. Two possible interpretations of our new theme can depend upon whether one emphasizes the "their success" or the "our success" part of the slogan.

- The success of students entering the water environment field ("their success") will ensure a proper supply of professionals to service the needs of our industry for many years to come, thus enabling us to continue to achieve our goals and objectives.
- Our ability to provide scholarship funds to this significant degree is a reflection of the successes we have achieved to date ("our success"), thus enabling us to "give back" to the profession that has fueled our achievement.

Scholarship Recipients

Since the inception of the Scholarship Program in 1998, over 30 students have benefited from the support of NYWEA members. With over \$50,000 in scholarships

already awarded, most scholarships have been in the amount of \$1,500. This past year the New York Water Environment Association awarded its first major scholarship to Alexis Sabine-Mathosian in the amount of \$10,000. Alexis is now attending Northeastern University. Other recipients have attended colleges and universities across the state and the Northeast, including Manhattan College, Cornell University, Cooper Union, Harvard University, SUNY-ESF, and SUNY Buffalo. Knowing that future environmental stewards are developing their talents at top institutions is inspiring.

For those of you who attended the opening session of the annual meeting, you were able to hear Mark Sheeran, NYWEA scholarship recipient and Manhattan College student, express his gratitude to the membership and convey how meaningful and rewarding the award has been to him. Other scholarship recipients have expressed their gratitude to NYWEA, such as Stephen Laun, a freshman environmental engineering student at Manhattan College who states, "This scholarship has provided me with a great opportunity, and I hope that it will continue to help others to achieve their goals"; and Lee Thomas Murray, an environmental sciences and engineering student at Harvard University, who states, "Having grown up literally adjacent to and being very much influenced by the tragedy of Love Canal, I knew

that after I graduated from Niagara Falls High School, I would go into some aspect of environmental studies"; to our recent successes, such as Sarah Meyer, a 1999 scholarship recipient and now SUNY-ESF graduate (with bachelor's and master's degrees) who last year was appointed community outreach coordinator for the Finger Lakes Institute. It is



2004 Scholarship winner Mark Sheeran (right) and Peter Radosta during the opening session of the 77th Annual Meeting.

apparent that our scholarship dollars are being invested in quality young people committed to making this world a better place!

Many of the scholarship recipients complete their undergraduate studies and subsequently enter the workforce. Others pursue graduate studies in environmental and related fields. Regardless of the students' ultimate academic and career paths, the assistance that NYWEA provides them goes well beyond the financial awards. Our organization provides a forum for professional development. We support student chapters, and we encourage members to reach out to students who are interested in environmental studies.

There are other areas of support that NYWEA offers, indirectly related to college-bound students. Examples include the work that the Public Education Committee provides local students and teachers, wastewater facility tours that are hosted by qualified treatment plant operators, and our involvement with broad environmental initiatives such as Earth Day.

Chapter Programs

Our chapters are vital to the promotion and success of student-based programs. Specifically, it is at the local chapter level where the relationships are nurtured with colleges and universities for the development of student chapters. One of the most fulfilling volunteer roles that some members



Left to right: Recognizing the winner of the \$10,000 scholarship, Diane Hammerman, co-chair of the Scholarship Committee; Alexis Sabine-Mathosian, \$10,000 scholarship winner; President Keneck Skibinski; Al Lopez, scholarship chair; and Patricia Cerro-Reehil, executive director.

such as Peter Radosta (article coauthor), provide to NYWEA is to serve as a guest speaker at the Clarkson University student chapter. The students enjoy hearing about some real-world experiences, while the speaker gets to see firsthand the energy and excitement that the students have for environmental studies and their involvement in NYWEA.

Further, one can witness at many of the chapters, local NYWEA members having the opportunity to engage with students at the respective chapter functions—what better way for students to engage with the diversity of our membership! And for NYWEA members attending such functions, they get to meet and interact with those who will become our successors.

The NYWEA chapters make a significant impact on the overall effectiveness of the Scholarship Program. Several chapters have annual programs specifically designed to meet the needs of local members. For example, the Capital and Central Chapters have awarded multiple scholarships annually for the past several years. Students are solicited to submit applications, which require detailed information about their academic and community service experience. Applicants are also required to write essays that provide viewpoints on a certain environmentally related issues.

The Capital Chapter named its scholarship program in honor of Paul Farrell, who is a pioneer of pressure sewer systems (an important development in rural municipal infrastructure) and who has been a supporter of the Capital Chapter's scholarship program for many years. Students receiving scholarships have made significant impacts at their respective colleges, including RPI and Clarkson University.

In its program, the Central Chapter memorializes three local longtime NYWEA members—Harold Beardsley, Gary Gleason, and Jack Karanik. Feedback from local members indicated that donations would flow from those who were inspired by and



Photo Credit: Joe Mastriano, Dave Colbert

The Central Chapter presented four \$1,500 scholarships to the following four students on December 6, 2004: Paul Simonim, a sophomore at the SUNY College of Environmental Science and Forestry; Joseph Hamilton, a freshman at Syracuse University; Anna Harrod, a freshman at St. Lawrence University; and Michael Best, a junior at the SUNY College of Environmental Science and Forestry.

interacted with these three committed leaders. Schools within the Central Chapter that have environmental programs include SUNY-ESF, Syracuse University, and Cornell.

The Long Island Chapter, while awarding training scholarships to operators annually, essentially supports the NYWEA Scholarship Program by pledging to the fund from its reserves and making contributions through its Operations and Management Committee.

The Genesee Chapter also utilizes the association's program for its scholarship activities and has just increased its commitment to a \$7,500 pledge (\$1,500 per year for five years)!

The Lower Hudson Chapter took a leadership role this past year in supporting the state's program by contributing the entire net proceeds of its annual golf outing (\$2,753). That support is in addition to the two chapter scholarship awards they make annually.

The Metropolitan Chapter has an active chapter scholarship program, awarding two \$1,000 scholarships annually. The Metropolitan Chapter is home to many colleges, including Manhattan College, which continues to be an integral player in this association.

The Western Chapter has a long-established and very successful program, which has demonstrated benefits to the scholarship recipients as well as to the local members. As Bob Lannon, state representative and chair of the Western Chapter Scholarship Committee reflects: "Perhaps one of the most beneficial aspects of NYWEA's Scholarship Program is providing students an enhanced opportunity to attend the college or university of their choice. The stu-

dents of today will become the environmental professionals of tomorrow and will surely play an ever-increasing role in protecting our global environment. I enthusiastically support NYWEA's Scholarship Program." The Western Chapter also has several learning institutions that have environmental programs, among them SUNY Buffalo, which has yielded many of our current and former NYWEA leaders.

Our local chapter programs supplement the association's program by providing thousands of dollars of scholarship awards annually to local students. Beyond the financial aspect of these programs, those NYWEA members involved with the application process have the opportunity to meet many of tomorrow's environmental leaders. The capability of these students is truly remarkable. Each of the chapters supports the Scholarship Program in its own unique way. The common thread is that students benefit from our collective support.

The Next Phase of the Campaign

Whatever perspective from which one views our new theme of "Their Success is Our Success," it represents the next phase of NYWEA's Scholarship Program, notably one of the most successful programs ever undertaken by the association. This altruistic program has, to date, raised more than \$300,000 in pledged and received monies from individual members, corporate partners, and NYWEA, which has enabled us to reach our initial goal.

As anyone familiar with the cost of tuition today can attest, with the price of a college education ranging from \$50,000 to over \$150,000 (depending upon state or private school educations), it has become increasingly difficult to provide a meaningful amount of scholarship funds to be perceived as relevant and worth the effort of applicants pursuing them in such a competitive environment. NYWEA's next phase has set its goal at \$1,000,000 in pledges and funding by the year 2010. The attainment of that goal will enable us to award more scholarships and at higher dollar amounts, thus making the NYWEA presence felt as a significant organization in representing and supporting the water environment field.

How We Attain Our Goals

While it is significant that we have achieved our initial goal of \$300,000, it is disappointing that overall support of the program by the membership as a whole has been low. Less than five percent of our membership has made a financial commitment to



Rich Lyons presented two \$500 Capital District Chapter R. Paul Farrell scholarships to Amanda B. Carpenter and Heather Ferris. R. Paul Farrell is also pictured.



Scholarship committee chair, Al Lopez, presents Thalia Loor with a certificate.

the Scholarship Program. This lack of individual support is reflective of an attitude of “letting the other person or company do it” or “what is this going to do for me?” Lack of participation is not attributable to insufficient personal resources. It would be rare to find someone in the association who could not make a minimum pledge of \$100 (\$20 per year for five years). In supporting a program, it is partly the dollars and partly the level of membership support that determines how successful a program becomes. The benefits of participation flow in both directions—the students directly benefit from the financial and networking support,

and the member, as a contributor, can gain a sense of fulfillment for supporting this most worthy program.

On the corporate level, there have been a number of our companies that have “stepped up” and made a significant pledge. There are others that have made a token contribution or something much less than they are able to do. For us to achieve our new goal, it is essential that original supporters of the program renew their pledges, and those who have yet to participate or who have done so at much lower levels than their abilities allow step up and be counted with a significant pledge.

Benefits of a Successful Program

As most of us are aware, the number of students graduating from college today with science or engineering degrees and interested in actively pursuing a career in the environmental field is insufficient to provide the staffing and technical expertise necessary to properly address the needs of our industry for years to come. While technology continues to advance, it is critical that we attract the best and the brightest to our field to supply the professionals necessary to continue to develop and utilize that technology. The future of our environment is dependent upon our success.

For those of us who have taken an active role in supporting the goals of this organization, it is essential that we demonstrate to our newer members and future members our commitment to the water environment cause, not just for ourselves but for our children and generations of children to come. This is truly a program of which each NYWEA member can be proud. Remember, their success is our success!

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Donor Snapshots: We Know the Program Works.



Bob Lannon

Perhaps one of the most beneficial aspects of NYWEA's Scholarship Program is providing students an enhanced opportunity to attend the college or university of their choice. Reflecting back on my college career at Syracuse University, I recall how fortunate I was to participate in SU's scholarship program. By contributing to this worthy program, I am filled with a sense of gratification and accomplishment because I am helping to provide an opportunity to those students who, without our support, may not have the opportunity to pursue their college careers. For these reasons, I enthusiastically support NYWEA's Scholarship Program.

My belief is that the measure of our success as individuals is not the plaques on our walls or the toys we've accumulated but rather the accomplishments of the individuals we've mentored or assisted in their careers. As such, it is with great pleasure and enthusiasm that I renew my pledge to the NYWEA Scholarship Program, knowing that I am contributing to a program which facilitates opportunity for future environmentalists and engineers.



Alfonso Lopez