YIPWEAQ Experience – Gold Coast Conference October 2018

The Gold Coast, Australia. From theme parks to shopping, surfing to ancient rainforest, the recent Commonwealth Games host city was an iconic location for the IPWEAQ Annual Conference. Coined as our “best conference ever”, 485 conference participants made their way to the sunny (at times) venue.

Being a recent university graduate, this was of course my first experience at a state level engineering conference and one of a few visits to a city bigger than my home town of Cairns.

The conference kicked off with four Tech Tours showcasing the innovations and engineering excellence of significant aspects required for everyday operation of facilities from the City of Gold Coast (COGC), and I was fortunate to participate in the Oceanway (Coast Engineering & Bikeways) Tech Tour.

A friendly yet serious game of bingo then progressed at the Welcome Function producing a fine way of mingling and learning interesting facts about different delegates.

The first full day of the conference kicked off with an excellent keynote presentation by Michael McQueen which left the audience contemplating the future and questioning if they were surviving in the ever-changing environment which is business.

A never-ending supply of inspirational and meaningful quotes were given throughout the talk with suggestions on how to continue (or begin) to run a successful business.

“Resisting change is like holding your breath, even if you’re successful, it won’t end well.”

Michael McQueen

Networking was an integral part of this conference and essential to maintain and develop a strong community of public works professionals. This had potential to be overwhelming for the under 35’s young professionals attending however thanks to the new YIPWEAQ Buddy Program the strain was greatly reduced. Special thanks to my mentor Glenda Kirk from the Mareeba Shire Council for her help connecting with embedded professionals and her overall guidance.

The exhibitors were another important part of the conference. I very much enjoyed speaking with each exhibitor in order to understand the most up to date technology and innovations they have to offer, to help grow my ever increasing – but currently somewhat limited – knowledge of engineering works.

Perhaps the most difficult part of the two-and-a-half-day experience was deciding which presentation to attend when the program was split into streams.

Many thanks to mentor Glenda Kirk (Mareeba Shire Council) for her support through the Buddy Program.
With available time for only nine presentations out of a total of 36, it was inevitable you would miss out on something good! I opted to spread my attendance across the different streams with intentions to see the most out of the interesting topics of sustainable communities, infrastructure assets, network operations and innovative solutions.

The second annual Futures Challenge was a highlight of day one featuring some very professional and dedicated students from QUT, USQ, and CQU. This saw the judges (the audience) having to make a very difficult decision choosing the best presentation. Congratulations to Maddy Stahlhut for taking the top prize.

The Excellence Awards Gala Dinner was a fantastic experience. Congratulations to all of the 22 award recipients on the night! I of course had to take it easy on the celebrations as the next day I was required to be cool and composed for my presentation on the use of Recycled Glass in Concrete, which is about to be trialled in a footpath in Cairns in December.

Before presenting I had the pleasure of listening to the story of Nic Marchesi and Lucas Patchett. These two founders of Orange Sky Laundry started the world's first free mobile laundry service when they were both as young as 20. Now almost five years later, the service has expanded to 27 sites across the country. The audience was left questioning what innovative projects they were completing at this age.

Other highlights of the concluding day included the comedic and eloquent Great Debate about whether tradition has a place in the modern workplace. The negative side inevitably took the win.

My first experience as a YIPWEAQ ambassador at a state-wide conference was most definitely a memorable and informative experience filled with new ideas, new outlooks, new connections and the everlasting message to never hold your breath.

My goal moving forward is to promote the appeal of such events and the overall job prospects of working as a public works engineer to the future generation.

Joshua Flanders
IPWEAQ Ambassador