Peter Whiteman is an all-too-familiar face to CHES members, having spent the better part of the past two decades serving in key posts for the society. So, it should come as no surprise (at least to those other than Whiteman) that the long-time advocate of the association is the recipient of this year’s Hans Burgers Award for Outstanding Contribution to Healthcare Engineering.

“I honestly wasn’t expecting it,” admits Whiteman, who is honoured to have received the recognition, particularly given it was bestowed upon him in his home province of Saskatchewan during this year’s CHES National Conference. “A person goes about their work and doesn’t think much of it until someone says, ‘You’re doing a good job and you have been for a long time.’”

Whiteman has been an engaged member of CHES since he joined in 1998. In addition to holding various executive positions on the national board, including treasurer, vice-president, president and past president, he has been involved in almost every committee, as well as dedicated great time and effort to supporting various subcommittees and events. Whiteman was instrumental in the development of an emergency facilities management human resources depository, which is essentially a database of experienced healthcare professionals that can assist in time of crisis, and played an important role in the growth of CHES across the country.

During his 10-year tenure on the national executive, membership nearly doubled to more than 1,100 from approximately 600. Further, he welcomed two new chapters into the fold: Manitoba and Saskatchewan.

“We originally tossed around the idea of having a combined Manitoba-Saskatchewan chapter but soon realized that wouldn’t work — Saskatchewan had the Health Facility Resource Council (HFRC) and the province wasn’t big enough to support two organizations,” explains Whiteman. “Moreover, having a multi-provincial organization can be problematic. All too often in healthcare there are budgetary constraints that restrict out-of-province travel, which meant we wouldn’t be able to go to Manitoba to attend meetings and vice versa.”

In 2007, CHES Manitoba was created with assistance from its first chapter chair, Gordon Neal. It took another eight years to bring Saskatchewan onboard — an endeavour that was aided by Whiteman’s determination to see this goal through to fruition. Being a founding member of CHES Saskatchewan’s predecessor, the HRFC, also helped.

“The organization promoted partnerships and collaboration amongst the then-
12 healthcare regions in the province, as well as with hospital suppliers and consultants, so a lot of its objectives aligned with CHES, making the transition ideal and relatively smooth,” says Whiteman, who is now a director on the Saskatchewan chapter executive.

Whiteman contributed to the formation of the Quebec chapter in 2017, too. Though no longer on the national board at that time, he did significant preliminary work to make CHES a truly national organization from coast-to-coast, including chairing the planning committee for the first-ever CHES National Conference to be held in la belle province.

CHES is not the only association Whiteman’s involved in. He is a member of the Association of Energy Engineers, achieving the Certified Energy Manager designation in 2013; sits on the board of directors of the Canadian Coalition for Green Health Care and the Saskatchewan Industrial Energy Consumers Association; and is active within the Regina chapter of the American Society of Heating, Refrigerating and Air-Conditioning Engineers. He also represented Saskatchewan on the Canadian College of Health Service Executives/Office of Energy Efficiency’s (Natural Resources Canada) national healthcare energy efficiency advisory committee from 2001-2007, which set the structure for healthcare energy efficiency programs at the national level.

Whiteman’s long history of volunteering mirrors that of his storied 32-year career in facilities management — his leadership has resulted in significant contributions that have improved the healthcare sector.

But Whiteman’s path wasn’t always in healthcare. He was previously a carpenter from northern Alberta, only moving to Saskatchewan in 1980. It was here, while working on the construction of a senior care facility in Kindersley, that Whiteman made the transition.

“I had met with the owners throughout the project and when it was nearing completion, they asked if I’d consider joining their team to lead the plant and maintenance department,” he recalls.

During his tenure, Whiteman directed and imbedded his energy efficiency strategies into facilities management operational and maintenance requirements, aligning them with infrastructure renewal opportunities and his overarching sustainability plan. The first project he undertook was insulating the heating pipes in the basement, which improved patient comfort. From there, he embarked on a lighting retrofit, reprogrammed the ventilation system to utilize free cooling from outside air; changed the temperature setting on the boiler, and the list goes on. Combined, these initiatives eventually reduced the facility’s annual utility consumption by more than 33 per cent and garnered the Kindersley Health District an award, The Most Successful Energy Consumption reduction. This resulted in more than half a million dollars in annual savings that continue to be realized to this day.

“It’s about making the right decisions, optimizing the delivery of value, and balancing the costs, opportunities and risks against the desired performance of assets to achieve the organizational objective,” says Whiteman about carrying out an effective asset management plan, adding a quality operations and maintenance program is continuously evolving.

“The program doesn’t have to be overly complex or elaborate. It can be as simple as documenting policies, procedures and related activities, with the aim of ensuring the necessary checks are carried out during the year.”

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