



## One AWWA Operator Scholarship

**T**ired, John choked down the last mouthful and tossed the sandwich wrapper in the trash bin before kicking the mud off his boots and reaching for the front door. It had been a long day and there was more to do. The sandwich, which had sat in his lunch pail since early morning, marked the transition from dutiful hometown public works laborer to determined night student. John's educational goal was to progress from his current job to a meaningful career—one as a professional water and wastewater operator.

He was in his early twenties, freshly married and, before his schooling was over, he would also be a father. He was raised in the small town that was now his employer and he was balancing all the challenges that young family men and women have to balance—plus going to school. During the five years of evening and weekend classes, John's operator education would help him move from being an entry-level operator to the top levels of licensed water and wastewater operator.

As the door closed behind him, John was met by fellow students, all of whom were in similar situations—each working long, hard days and forsaking other things, important things, for the chance at a brighter future in which they could provide for their families and make a difference in their communities.

The students had another common and stressful bond—how to pay for the education they desperately desired. Some, like John, had employer support, but many had to pay their own way. If only there were a way to ease the stress of financing their education—that would be significant.

And now there is. Slightly over a year ago, AWWA created a philanthropic program called The Water Equation, which is based on the idea that Knowledge + Sharing = Transformation. One of AWWA's strategies for solving this equation is to focus on the *knowledge* variable in the equation and grow AWWA's existing scholarship portfolio into the world's largest scholarship portfolio for water.

Step one in growing AWWA's scholarship program is to help solve the funding challenges

of water operator education. To do this, we have created the One AWWA Operator Scholarship. This new scholarship gets its name from combining, into *one*, the funding power of AWWA's Association and Sections; together we meaningfully improve the financing options that support operator education and help generations of students like John and his classmates meet their goals and, quite frankly, society's needs.

The idea behind the One AWWA Operator Scholarship goes beyond helping students pay for their education. This scholarship also helps solve the water sector's present and future need for more trained, educated, and licensed operators. It is an important step forward, and here is how it will work:

- Each AWWA Section can create a new One AWWA Operator Scholarship.
- The Association will match, dollar for dollar, Section funding to create one or two scholarships each totaling \$1,000 or a single scholarship totaling \$2,000.
- Scholarship candidates apply to their Section and the Section determines the recipient(s).
- The recipient(s) can use the funds for certification/licensure, two-year community college water programs, professional training programs, books and manuals, etc.
- The recipient(s) receive a complimentary year-long operator membership with AWWA.

You can find out how to apply for the One AWWA Operator Scholarship in two easy steps. First, check out the list of participating Sections on the AWWA website, [www.awwa.org](http://www.awwa.org). Then, if your Section is participating, contact your Section to obtain an application and any other instructions.

If you wish to help make it a little easier for an operator to pay for his or her education, you can do so by making a donation to the One AWWA Operator Scholarship Fund. All you have to do is click on the "Donate" button on AWWA's website.

Turns out that John's educational determination worked. Today he serves proudly as a utility CEO, and he is finishing a stint on the AWWA board that includes serving as AWWA's president. John recently traveled to India where, among other things, he spoke on water regulations in the United States and fielded questions about the importance of operator certification in meeting those regulations. In many ways John represents the advantages gained by the water sector when someone decides to become a water operator.

Through The Water Equation, One AWWA Operator Scholarship Fund, and working together, we can make it easier for others to achieve the same dreams that John did. And together we can help solve the water sector's need for well-educated, trained, and licensed operators. Now that is significant!

<http://dx.doi.org/10.5942/jawwa.2016.108.0058>

If you have any comments or concerns, please write me at [OpenChannel@awwa.org](mailto:OpenChannel@awwa.org).

