

2021 PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT
CONFERENCE

WISCONSIN ASSOCIATION OF AGRICULTURAL EDUCATORS



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...from La Crosse

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SAUK CITY; WIS. – The 2021 WAAE Professional Development Conference was held June 27-29, 2021 in person at the Radisson Hotel in La Crosse, WI. With almost 250 ag educators in attendance, plus guests, exhibitors, and sponsors, the event was well attended. Saying farewell as the first WAAE president to not meet his Board in person all year, until the conference began, Kevin Rauchholz gave his retiring address:

As they say on TV “Live from New York its Saturday Night.” As you can probably tell we are not in New York and it is not Saturday Night. Even better than being in New York we are “Live from La Crosse.” I cannot express how happy I am to be standing in front of you and not in a Zoom or Teams meeting. Honestly, I was really afraid to be the first president in the history of WAAE to not meet with the board or the WAAE organization in person. I am so glad that didn’t happen!

I am sure you are wondering about the title of my retiring speech, “When Thoughts and Dreams Come True.” Well let me backup a few years and start this journey with you. It is the spring of 2000 and two of my great mentors, Randy

Tenpas and Dale Drees, (I am sure a few of you know who those guys are) said I needed to go to the then called WVAI Conference in Madison. I was not really sure of what they were actually talking about but I signed up anyway. Just guessing there may be more than one first year teacher perhaps having the same thoughts I did.

Well I did go that first year and every year since then. I was so impressed with how the conference was run. I remember the first banquet I attended in Madison. I clearly remember thinking, "wow this organization is huge." I really didn't know anyone in the room other than Fox Valley Technical College people. I admit to being a little shell shocked at the thought of not knowing that many people. I remember other things about my first conference. Things like eating the soup that has become tradition and watching how a flawless banquet was happening right before my very eyes. I remember listening to the retiring president's address by Milt Olson for those who can remember that far back. I was awestruck, so impressed. Upon leaving the banquet thoughts of perhaps leading this organization started crossing my mind. This was unusual for me as I was never the "President" of anything.

I thought about being a leader in WAAE, I dreamt about it, I acted upon it. I truly enjoyed the workshops and the banquets but most of all I enjoyed getting to know more and more of the "WAAE Family" each year. As time went past I served on the board twice and before I knew it I had the opportunity to run for president. Wow my "Thoughts and Dreams did Come True."

Making positive contributions and strengthening our organization was always a high priority of mine. With that being said I'd like to share a little analogy, apparently being WAAE President is a lot like parenting in the fact it doesn't come with a detailed instruction manual. WAAE has been through some historic times in the past year and a half. From hiring a new Executive Director, to running a historic virtual conference last summer, not having face-to-face meetings of any type and running the Career Development Events virtually. Yes, the last year was different and challenging. Figuring out how to run things during the pandemic was not an easy task. Figuring out how to run our organization facing financial stress was not easy. I tried to stay involved as I could during this last year. Who would have thought we would have a virtual committee, a banquet committee, a new Executive Director, all WAAE Board meetings online, virtual CDE meetings, a virtual CDE and numerous other meetings that I am missing here. Please don't get me wrong, I am not complaining. Fact of the matter I enjoyed being part of the

leadership group that guided WAAE. I am proud of what we have been able to accomplish this past year. WAAE is strong and financially sound in spite of going through a challenging year. If we can remain patient I am sure there will be more positive things we learned about during COVID.

I need to thank several members that have mentored me along the way. First of all, I would like to thank our Past President Kris Beaver. Kris, your leadership and knowledge of WAAE and its business operations are second to none. Thank you for mentoring me for the past several years, I appreciate your help. Roger King our President Elect, thank you Roger for all of your input and knowledge have been so helpful. Kathy Hartmann-Breunig what can I say about your first year with us. You were hired just before all things broke loose. Talk about "Baptism by Fire." I want you to know I am so proud of all of the work you have done for WAAE the past year. Your job could have not been easy to learn about WAAE right in the middle of doing everything differently. You are so helpful and cheerful, especially when I needed help. Kathy, you probably don't have any idea how many times you cheered me up when I called you when I needed help. Thank you. Please allow me to thank the current WAAE board. Thank you for being on the board and your contributions to our organization. I truly appreciate your support.

Please allow me to thank the staff and administration at Fox Valley Technical College. Thank you for your support over the past six years while I served on the board. Thank you for covering my classes while I needed to be away. Thank you for the words of encouragement when I needed them. I appreciate your friendship and I appreciate working with you.

I need to express a lot of appreciation to my wife Patti. She has been so supportive of me as I served as your president. Patti, thank you for your understanding when I needed to be in meetings and not spending time with you. I appreciate your support.

I want to thank my WAAE mentors and colleagues (fellow board members, teachers, friends) I have met and worked with along the way. Thank you for the memories of all of the times we spent together. PDC, NAAE, perhaps in your classroom, perhaps the golf course at PDC. Our WAAE Family has meant a lot to me and has helped shape my career at the college.

As I wrap up my speech tonight please remember to contribute to the NAAE Relief Fund as we have had several members that needed help this past year. Honestly, I was a first-time contributor last year. Not sure why it took me so long but I now know how important our contributions are to help our fellow members. I want to reach out and encourage each and every one of you Ag Teachers and say keep up the good work. You are so important to our industry, to your family, friends and students. You are part of a strong organization called WAAE. You are part of this family. Be strong and take care of yourself. A lot of people need you.

Thank you.

WAAE is the professional association for agricultural educators in Wisconsin. Members include 410 middle school, high school, technical college and university educators. The focus of the association is to provide professional development, legislative support and educational resources for teachers to enhance their local agriculture education programs.

For more information about your local agriculture education program and to find out how you can support agriculture in your community, please contact your local agriculture education instructor or visit www.waae.com.

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