

RISING TO THE CHALLENGE

Maritime chapter overcomes obstacles to secure second straight award win

It's hard to believe the outlook for 2020 was so rosy at the start of the year. In what seems like an instant yet forever ago, the world changed and so did everyone's way of life. Telecommuting has replaced the traditional office for most and virtual meetings are now the norm in response to the coronavirus threat. No industry or organization has been exempt from the impact of COVID-19, not even the Canadian Healthcare Engineering Society (CHES).

As the country locked down in mid-March, the association's regional chapters opted to forego their annual spring conferences in the name of safety, but perhaps the decision was no more difficult than for the Maritime chapter. Host of the 2020 CHES National Conference, the chapter had spent more than a year planning the event in collaboration with the national executive, which amounted to hundreds of volunteer hours that were swiftly discounted by the virus.

"It was disappointing," says chapter chair, Helen Comeau, frankly.

However, receiving the news that CHES Maritime won the President's Award for a second straight year has since lifted her spirits, as well as those of the executive team: Robert Barss, Mark McNeill, Gordon Jackson, Ken Morrissey, Andrew Bradley and Kerry Fraser.

"I was extremely honoured as each year it is such a close competition between our chapters," says Comeau, who accepted the award on behalf of the chapter.



▲ LEFT TO RIGHT: Helen Comeau with photo of Mark McNeill, Ken Morrissey, Robert Barss, Andrew Bradley and Gordon Jackson with photo of Kerry Fraser. The Maritime chapter has now won the President's Award three times, in 2015, 2019 and 2020.

This is the third time the Maritime chapter has been recognized with the award, the first being in 2015. CHES Ontario is the only other chapter to have achieved such a feat.

The President's Award is presented annually to the CHES chapter that demonstrates its commitment to education, administration and representation in the activities of the

chapter and national board. Each chapter is scored on accounting practices, conference/education day, membership, chapter executive practices, committee work and additional offerings (from submitting articles to providing extra member benefits). Specifically, points are given for activities that benefit members and

the work of CHES, such as number of meetings attended in the course of committee work and special education sessions. The recipient of the much-coveted award receives two CHES national conference registrations and expenses to a maximum of \$2,500 each, as well as a trophy engraved with the victorious team's names.

"The continued dedication of our team paid off in what has been an extremely challenging time," says Comeau.

Despite being unable to meet in person this year (up until Sept. 24 for the award presentation in Moncton, N.B., thanks to the creation of the Atlantic bubble), each member of the chapter executive diligently carried out their duties in addition to their regular healthcare roles, which have become even more demanding amid the pandemic. This on top of the fact that the cancellation of the 2020 CHES National Conference and subsequent rescheduling to next year increased the chapter's workload, says Comeau.

"We needed new contracts and some of the venues were no longer available so we had to move the conference to October," she explains. "This change in timing then affected some of our planned events for the companion program."

On the plus side, the financial impact of the upheaval has been minimal.

"Everyone was so understanding," says Comeau, who is delighted they were able to secure their preferred venue — the Halifax Convention Centre.

The 2021 CHES National Conference will take place Oct. 17-19, barring any unforeseen setbacks. The theme is still, 'Enriching Patient Experiences by Optimizing the Environment.'

In lieu of the chapter's fall education day, which was scheduled for November

in Truro, N.S., and also cancelled due to COVID-19, CHES Maritime is considering hosting a virtual learning day sometime next spring.

The chapter is currently exploring ways to increase its membership, too. The executive team is focused on gaining the support of long-term care facilities to achieve this goal.


Despite all the hardships of the past year, Comeau is particularly proud the chapter has been able to balance its books while offering several financial incentives to members, including free webinars, contributions to Canadian

Certified Healthcare Facility Manager (CCHFM) exam fees, student bursaries and other rebates.

In August, Patrick LeBlanc was named the recipient of this year's Per Paasche bursary. The \$1,000 grant is presented annually to a family member of a Maritime chapter member to assist with their post-secondary education. Patrick is the son of chapter member Dave LeBlanc, who works with the Nova Scotia Department of Transportation and Infrastructure Renewal. Patrick is pursuing mechanical engineering at the University of Ottawa. ■

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