# ROAD OF **DEVOTION**

## Mitch Weimer's continued active involvement in CHES comes from desire to always help

The last time Mitch Weimer attended the CHES National conference in person (prior to the pandemic), he passed the baton of past president to Preston Kostura, with the assumption he'd move into the shadows of the organization to work behind the scenes, while he carried on as director of facilities maintenance and operations with Fraser Health. But a lot can change in a few years, as everyone can attest.

This past spring, Weimer stepped away from his 31-year career in the healthcare industry, taking early retirement, and moved into a familiar position on the B.C. chapter executive.

"They sucked me back in," laughs the long-time member of the Canadian Healthcare Engineering Society (CHES).

Kidding aside, Weimer says he was humbled to be elected once again as vice-chair, which comes with the responsibility of planning the annual chapter conference — an event he helped elevate on his initial time around on the executive committee (2006-2014).

In 2006, Weimer replaced mentor Tim Kelly as vice-chair (at Kelly's request), marking the start of a new level of service to the organization. While a staunch supporter of CHES previous to this, and member since shortly after he attended his very first chapter conference in Kamloops in 1992, the new role ignited a passion in Weimer to further the work of CHES and raise its status in the healthcare industry.

"It's an organization that if you don't have the answer or you have challenges, you can always find somebody to help and support you," he says.

Early on in his tenure, Weimer helped expand the number of chapter-supported student bursaries to include six provincial colleges — British Columbia Institute of Technology, Okanagan College, College of New Caledonia, Camosun College, Selkirk College and Thompson Rivers University — and established a grassroots program that provides targeted funding to aid those unable to obtain financial assistance from their healthcare facility to attend the chapter conference. These 'education dollars' cover the cost of transportation, accommodation and registration for a set number of people per organization.

Weimer also worked to grow and modernize the B.C. chapter conference. This helped bring financial stability to the chapter, as well as ushered in a period of interest in CHES B.C. unparalleled in its

history that resulted in a long stretch of personnel consistency on the executive.

"You build the brand and people will come, and we did that by planning and pulling off a great conference," says Weimer. "It got people excited to get involved, remain and run through the progression of positions on the chapter executive. We didn't have any turnover."

Weimer, like his CHES colleagues, stayed the course, moved into the role of chair and, in tandem, took a seat at the table of CHES National representing B.C. In 2012, he was approached by former president Mike Hickey about putting his name forward for vice-president. The rest, he says, is history, as he was elected the following year, which began his six-year term as vice-president (2013-2015), president (2015-2017) and past president (2017-2019).

"My overall CHES career has been a series of fortunate events of being asked by some of my mentors to join in and my inability to say no," says Weimer in jest.

While much was accomplished over the course of those six years, Weimer is most proud that CHES became a truly coast-to-coast organization with representation from all provinces — a goal set into motion by previous presidents. In fall 2015, past president Peter Whiteman organized the successful campaign in Saskatchewan where the Health Facility Resource Council merged with CHES to become the Saskatchewan chapter. Two years later, in spring 2017, the organization welcomed the Quebec chapter into the fold.

Another outstanding 'moment' was when the board decided to move forward with a bid to host the 2022 International Federation of Healthcare Engineering (IFHE) Congress. Weimer put forth the motion in 2016, and after "a fair amount of lobbying and cajoling," it was approved. CHES was selected to host the esteemed event at the 2018 IFHE Congress in Brisbane, Australia. Competition was fierce, with the Canadian association up against those in the United States and South Africa. After a two-stage voting process, which eliminated the South African Federation of Hospital Engineering after the first round, CHES was victorious in a count of 14-6 against the Health Care Institute from the U.S.

Attending the congress this past September, held in conjunction with the 2022 CHES National Conference, held particular significance to Weimer, as he got to experience what he set in motion all those years ago that past presidents Preston Kostura and Roger Holliss, and the hard-working planning committee led by then-Ontario chapter chair Jim McCarthur brought to fruition. The proverbial icing on the cake is he received his 30-year pin at the esteemed event, commemorating decades of service with CHES, and he was recognized with the Hans Burgers Award for Outstanding Contribution to Healthcare Engineering, an accolade he graciously accepted but was not originally expecting.

"I was stunned," says Weimer about the call he received in June, notifying him of the award win. "With so many excellent and deserving people across Canada, I'm just honoured to have even been considered."

Since retiring in April, Weimer has had time to reflect on his three decades long career in the healthcare industry, beginning in 1991, when he was hired as a maintenance engineer for the long-term residential care facility, George Pearson Centre, in Vancouver. In 1993, he was promoted to become the physical plant manager, a position he held for seven years before moving to Fraser Health where he served in various roles, including both manager and director of plant services and construction, up until his most recent position. In hindsight, he says his greatest achievement was putting a retention program in place that went a long way in keeping top talent and increasing job satisfaction.

"We invested in education and training staff to provide a more defined path and process for advancement within the organization," explains Weimer. "As a result, we only hired two people (in my department) from outside the organization. Virtually all my supervisory and managerial positions came from within."

Looking to the future, Weimer can't wait to see the completion of the new Surrey hospital and cancer centre in 2027, and redevelopments of Burnaby and Royal Columbian hospitals in 2026 — all three of which he advocated for during his time at Fraser Health. In the meantime, he's enjoying downtime with family, including camping and coaching soccer, and volunteering for associations like CHES and CSA Group until he finds his next passion.

"I'm waiting to see what speaks to me," says Weimer. "I want to do something for the right reasons." ■