

A COLLECTIVE EFFORT

B.C. chapter executive pulls together to win President's Award in back-to-back years



▲ LEFT TO RIGHT: B.C. chapter members Norbert Fischer, Mark Swain, Dawn Chan, Sarah Thorn, Steve McEwan, Rick Molnar, Mitch Weimer and Arthur Buse with Luis Rodrigues of Trane (left of centre). Missing from photo is CHES B.C.'s Caroline Reid.

After another uncertain year fuelled by an unpredictable virus, the Canadian Healthcare Engineering Society (CHES) was once again challenged. Unsure of what the coming months would hold at the start of 2022, due to the emergence of the Omicron variant and subsequent surge in infections, local chapters began to reassess plans to hold in-person events scheduled for spring. While some cancelled, others cautiously continued making arrangements in the hopes their respective annual conferences could be face-to-face again. Time was on their side as provinces began lifting COVID-19 restrictions in late winter soon after the peak of the largest wave, as Canada's chief public health officer said the country had to find a more "sustainable" way to deal with the pandemic since the virus is here to stay. In early June, nearly 520

people convened in Whistler for CHES British Columbia's conference to the delight of Sarah Thorn, who assumed the role of chapter chair at the annual general meeting held during the event.

"We were worried about whether people would want to attend and if they'd get the approvals to travel, but it ended up being a great success," says Thorn. "We had a huge turnout in terms of attendance, and sponsorships and booths were both sold out. This speaks to how eager everyone was to get back together for face-to-face interactions."

The industry's reaction in B.C. was a good indication of what to expect at this year's CHES national conference in Toronto. Held in conjunction with the International Federation of Healthcare Engineering (IFHE) congress, Sept. 17-21, the event was doubly exciting for members of CHES B.C.'s executive, who not only got

to experience another in-person event in a matter of months but also took the stage at the gala banquet to accept the President's Award for a second year in a row.

"It was a really proud moment," says Thorn, who was joined by Mitch Weimer (vice-chair), Rick Molnar (treasurer), Norbert Fischer (past chair), Dawn Chan (secretary), Mark Swain (website/written communications) Arthur Buse (membership) and Steve McEwan (conference support). (Caroline Reid (education) was unable to attend.) "The CHES B.C. executive always works incredibly hard."

This is the third time the chapter has been bestowed the recognition. The first was in 2014, when the President's Award launched, and then again in 2021. Thorn, who sat on the chapter executive (along with other existing members) during the inaugural award win, attributes this year's accomplishment to the unwavering dedication of her CHES colleagues who often "work off the side of their desk" given the voluntary nature of their roles, and to the solid foundation laid by previous iterations of the chapter executive.

"The work we do is a baton of history that we continue to pass forward year to year," says Thorn. "We carry all the legacies of those before us who have done the heavy lifting."

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 CHES's journal, *Canadian Healthcare Facilities*, 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 paid up to a maximum of \$2,500 each, as well as a trophy engraved with the victorious team's names.

Since the chapter's last crowning achievement, the executive has focused on providing added value to members in order to sustain numbers and attract new recruits. This led to the creation of the Healthcare Award in late 2021. Presented for the first time ever at this year's conference, Steve McTaggart was bestowed the honour for his outstanding contribution to healthcare engineering in B.C.

"Steve's legacy speaks for itself — his work has touched numerous healthcare facilities in the province," says Thorn about the nearly 40-year industry veteran who retired in 2019 to pursue other interests. "He has made endless contributions to the field, both professionally and as a member of CHES, for more than 20 years, but his mentorship and continued desire to pay it forward is one of his greatest achievements."

McTaggart was among nearly two dozen chapter members acknowledged at this year's event. Longstanding achievement plaques were handed out to 21 others in celebration of their support of CHES for upwards of 25 years.

"There are countless people making a difference to our organization that aren't on the chapter executive and it's important to recognize them for their service," says Thorn. "Plus, not everyone can go to the CHES national conference and experience the awards gala, so it's great to host our own celebrations."

Aware of the challenges of even travelling locally, the chapter executive decided to make a day pass available at a reduced rate to accommodate engineers, architects and other industry partners unable to attend all three days the B.C. conference due to work commitments.

The event was also not exclusive to CHES B.C. members; non-members, including frontline workers ineligible for conference funding from their health authority, were invited to attend at no cost.

"Budgets are getting tighter, so we wanted to support opportunities for learning wherever we could," says Thorn.

Because of its good financial standing, the chapter has remained committed to cover-

ing the Canadian Certified Healthcare Facility Manager (CCHFM) exam fee for anyone interested in pursuing the designation, and continues to offer a \$1,000 tuition grant to members in good standing who want to take education programs that will help further their careers within hospital engineering services departments. As well, the chapter has maintained its support of bursaries at six colleges — British Columbia Institute of Technology, Okanagan College, College of New Caledonia, Camosun College, Selkirk College and Thompson Rivers University.

These member benefits have helped reverse the national trend in declining participation in CHES; the B.C. chapter has added 62 new members so far this year. Thorn also attributes the uptick in enrolment to diversification — the executive has reached out to facilities groups outside the normal member base, such as capital projects, infection prevention and control, energy and sustainability, clinical planners, integrated protection services and workplace health leaders, who play a critical role

in managing, maintaining, renovating and building the province's healthcare facilities.

In addition to opening up membership to more groups, CHES B.C. is welcoming new faces to the chapter executive as part of its succession planning efforts. Many of the same people have resided on the executive for upwards of a decade and even more, including Thorn who has served in various roles for the past 12 years. While she, like all long-time executive members, thoroughly enjoys being a part of the professional circle and the high-value connections it affords, Thorn recognizes it's necessary to bring younger volunteers into the fold.

"They offer new ideas and a different perspective to meet the challenges of today, while allowing us to prepare to meet the future needs of CHES B.C.," says Thorn. "Now is the time to mentor the next generation. This is the best way to pass on the knowledge and learnings acquired through years of experience, while providing opportunities for growth, network expansion and to effect change in CHES and the healthcare industry as a whole." ■

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