

# Women in Water at WEFTEC®

## Networking breakfast delivers inspirational messages

**W**omen leaders of all ages filled the room for the first annual WEFTEC Breakfast With Women Water

Leaders.

Sandra Ralston, past president of the Water Environment Federation (Alexandria, Va.), welcomed attendees to the sold-out event. Karen Pallansch, CEO of Alexandria (Va.) RENew Enterprises, thanked the audience for attending. “We’re really trying to bring the water sector together,” Pallansch said. “The more we can help each other, the more we can grow and help our colleagues ... be successful.”

### Keynote speaker welcomes a “room full of greatness”

Pallansch introduced keynote speaker, Debra Shore, who currently is serving her second term on the Metropolitan Water Reclamation District of Greater Chicago board of commissioners.

“We are in a room full of greatness,” Shore said. “This opportunity [is] for women in water to meet and greet and get to know each other. Whether we realize it or not we are a sorority and I hope when we leave here today we will find ways to connect and support and sustain each other.”

Shore, a philosophy, art, and writing major, shared her experience in the water sector. As an avid hiker and camper, she entered the water world by volunteering to help restore ecological health to native prairies and trees in northeastern Illinois. Her anger at the lack of action to protect nature encouraged her to create Friends of the Forest Preserves (Chicago), an organization to advocate for resources to protect the forests. She then volunteered on political campaigns and helped recruit and groom women for political office.

### Run for office

“One day just over a decade ago, someone suggested that I consider running for a seat on the board of the Metropolitan Water Reclamation District given my interest in conservation and the vital role the district plays in managing water resources in Cook County,” Shore said.

She knew that water matters and realized she could talk with “passion and



Debra Shore, commissioner for the Metropolitan Water Reclamation District of Greater Chicago, gives the keynote speech at the first annual WEFTEC Breakfast With Women Water Leaders. Oscar & Associates



Women leaders listened to speakers and participated in facilitated table discussions during the WEFTEC Breakfast With Women Water Leaders. Oscar & Associates



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authenticity" on the topic, she said.

Shore explained that studies by the Center for American Women and Politics at Rutgers University (New Brunswick, N.J.) show that women have to be asked to run for office because they worry about their qualifications and families.

"Women need to be asked. So let me ask you now: Will you run for office? We need more engineers, more biologists, more chemists, nurses, architects, and writers in public office. And I know you can do it. Please run," Shore said.

### Share stories that connect

When talking to the public, Shore describes how she wanted to replace her impermeable driveway with a permeable surface. After doing the calculations, if, she

realized, she could capture and treat all the rain that falls on her roof and driveway in a year, it would meet 124% of her annual water use, she said.

"If you can talk with knowledge, and passion, and authenticity about the things you care about, people will respond," Shore said. "If you tell stories that connect with people's lives, they will remember."

### Spread the message

Shore added that changing the culture for women in the workforce is necessary still. It starts with younger women seeing what is possible through current examples, she said.

"If we are visible and excited about what we do, then we can capture the imaginations of young women and launch

them into future rooms full of greatness," she said.

Shore encouraged attendees to become mentors; go into schools to talk to students; allow students to shadow them at work; and share the message through articles, blogs, and videos. She asked attendees complete a prepaid postcard with their address and a declaration of how they will introduce young women into the sector. She promised to mail these postcards in the future to remind them of their pledges.

"We women in water ... we protect the drinking water supply for millions of people," Shore said. "We women in water ensure quality of life for millions of people. We women in water, we make the world go 'round."

— Jennifer Fulcher, WE&T

## Innovation Pavilion fosters meaningful business connections



WEFTEC 2015 attendees network during one of the two Innovation Pavilion Receptions. Oscar & Associates

**W**EF's Innovation Pavilion, located in the exhibition, features companies that offer water sector innovations, as well as educational sessions covering topics such as resource recovery

and reuse. During WEFTEC® 2015 attendees gathered here at two receptions to network.

Educational sessions seamlessly blended into networking as water technology startups participated in The

BREW Tank and The CROC Tank. These sessions, modeled after the television show *Shark Tank*, allow startup companies to pitch their innovations to a panel of water sector experts.