

New Year, Big Changes For UCTA

From its inception in May 1992, the Underground Construction Technology Association (UCTA) has been committed to educating and training its members on the use of traditional, trenchless and rehabilitation technologies, and promoting the use and application of these technologies along with addressing important trends and needs of the underground infrastructure industry. Now entering its twenty-third year of operation, the non-profit organization has grown from the original 12 members to nearly 60 corporate sponsors and hundreds of individuals. The largely volunteer group maintains its operations through time contributions.

UCTA's mission is to advance underground technology, both open-cut and trenchless, and to promote their benefits for the public and the natural environment by increasing awareness and knowledge through technical information dissemination, research and development, and education and training. The association fulfills these objectives by providing a forum for members to share information, to learn about these developments in its regular meetings and activities, and through the support of specific external programs.

Beginnings

UCTA, originally formed under the name Gulf Coast Trenchless Association, was a result of the Greater Houston Wastewater Program when tunneling contractors needed a forum to collaborate on means and methods as well as the latest technology for trenchless installation for sanitary sewer lines.

From those early days, the association has grown to include not only contractors but engineers, municipal employees, manufacturers and academia who are committed to promoting better and more responsible ways to manage the underground infrastructure.

More changes were in store for the association when in April 2009 the membership approved changing the association's name. Association officials say this name change was a strategic decision to broaden the scope and services of the trade association into all aspects of underground construction, generating additional support from the national level.

With the new name came a renewed drive to fulfill the role of the organization by facilitating local chapters in other metropolitan areas to service the needs of the underground construction community.

In 2010, the association welcomed its first regional chartered chapter, North Texas, serving the cities and surrounding areas of Dallas, Fort Worth, Arlington, Irving and Garland, TX. In 2014, further growth was realized with the formation of the South Texas Chapter,



David Ellett



Frank Crumb

covering the region from Austin through San Antonio and Laredo, TX. The Gulf Coast Chapter serves the greater southeast Texas region including Houston, Beaumont, Conroe, Galveston and The Woodlands, TX.

Banner year

UCTA experienced a busy year in 2014 with the addition of the new South Texas Chapter, hiring a new administrative company to manage its business affairs

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"It is the fruition of years of hard work by dedicated members of the UCTA that work and live in the South Texas region, and who are loyal supporters of both the Gulf Coast and North Texas chapters. I had the honor of being president when the goal was ultimately achieved, but the credit goes to those that preceded me.

"With growth in the South Texas region fueled by the energy sector, it easy to see that upgrades and expansion of infrastructure will be necessary to support and promote further growth," added Ellett. "The assimilation and distribution of information on the latest developments in underground construction techniques, equipment and materials will be

and enhance communication among the chapters, in addition to hosting engaging, knowledgeable speakers at the individual chapter general luncheon meetings.

"The most notable accomplishment of the past year was the addition of the South Texas Chapter," said UCTA Gulf Coast Chapter President David Ellett, senior project manager, BRH-Garver Construction.

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North Texas Chapter President Frank Crumb, public infrastructure business development for Halff Associates, agrees that "2014 has been a watershed year for UCTA." Crumb served the city of Fort Worth for 30 years before retiring as the water director in September 2014.

Besides adding a new chapter in south Texas, Crumb cites hiring a new administrative company and an improved website (uctaonline.org) as key elements going forward for the association. He went on to explain that Russell Ford of LAN Inc., current UCTA chapter liaison and former president of the Gulf Coast Chapter, championed the cause for adding more regions that could be best served by their association with UCTA.

"The benefits of adding new chapters are the additional scholarships we can offer to college students in the major metropolitan areas around the state as well as the sharing of technology and programs with our members from different parts of the state," explained Crumb. "Great improvements also have been made in how members communicate among the chapters since we hired the new association administrator."

Other notable accomplishments include education through sponsored affiliations, says Ellett. "The fact that we have the financial ability to advance our mission of education by sponsoring the UCTA affiliated educational programs, provide individual scholarships to children of members, and provide initial funding for chapters to extend the same mission has been the most satisfying achievement."

Member benefits

The opportunities available to UCTA members and their company are many, from the association's educational programs to training and networking with peers.

- The Underground Construction Technology (UCT) International Conference & Exhibition is held annually in January. UCTA members help develop educational sessions and workshops for the conference and organize networking and recognition events at the conference;
- The Most Valuable Professional (MVP) Award is presented jointly by the UCTA and *Underground Construction* magazine at a special ceremony held during UCT. The award recognizes a person who makes a significant, positive difference to their business or organization in the underground industry;

- Golf tournaments sponsored by each chapter fund scholarship support to the children and spouses of active UCTA members for a full-time course of study. In 2014, the Gulf Coast and North Texas chapters awarded 10 scholarships totaling \$10,000 to deserving students;
- The UCTA annually donates funds to the Trenchless Technology Center (TTC) at Louisiana Tech University, gaining a seat on the TTC's Industrial Advisory Board. Funds also are donated annually to the Center for Innovative Grouting Materials and Technology (CIGMAT) at the University of Houston, and the Center for Underground Infrastructure Research and Education (CUIRE) at the University of Texas at Arlington;
- Clay Shoot proceeds benefit the TTC, CIGMAT and CUIRE; and
- Members who attend the general luncheon meetings are eligible for one credit Professional Development Hour (PDH) for continuing education credits.

Ellett adds that unlike other industry organizations, UCTA is focused solely on underground construction and rehabilitation.

"By bringing owners, designers, manufacturers and contractors together under that focus," commented Ellett, "it's very easy for each aspect of the underground industry to learn



the most efficient way, we need to know what has worked and what has not worked in different areas. UCTA provides a format to evaluate potential solutions and pick the best one for your customers and rate payers.

"I like the idea of getting all three facets of the utility industry together to discuss common issues and new technology to improve existing infrastructure," he said. "We hear a lot about the crumbling infrastructure in America, and the utility industry has its share of infrastructure needs, but in the water and wastewater utilities across Texas, we have been very proactive in how we analyze the condition of our systems and funding solutions to upgrade old infrastructure as needed. Participation in

about the opportunities available to them."

"Also, we are in the business of spending public funds to extend, maintain and improve our water and wastewater infrastructure," added Crumb. "In order to do that in

UCTA is a great way to find out about these solutions and the people who can help you achieve them in your system."

Making a difference

As UCTA continues to grow and take on new challenges, the association plans to continue its commitment to serve and support its diverse industry partners.

Ellett said each UCTA chapter will continue to expand their membership with the ultimate goal of continuing to provide and expand educational opportunities for its members. "There has been interest in starting chapters in other areas," he said. "It will be interesting to see if those leads can be developed into viable opportunities in those regions."

Crumb expressed a desire to see continued improvements in maintaining coordination between the chapters' finances, luncheons and events for its members. "Increasing membership is always a top priority," he said. "I believe with our new administrator and web-hosting, it will be even easier to join and keep informed about UCTA activities in each region."

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Underground Construction Technology Association
(512) 251-8101, uctaonline.org