



Discovering New Ideas Down Under

By Don Guckert, APPA Fellow

When I learned that I would be attending an annual conference of the Tertiary Education Facilities Management Association (TEFMA) and its sister association, the Association for Tertiary Education Management (ATEM), in Melbourne, Australia this past September, I was wondering what to expect. This year's conference theme was "Eureka—Discovering New Ideas." The joint conference, known as the Tertiary Education Managers Conference (TEMC), was celebrating its 40th anniversary with a record-setting 922 attendees. TEMC featured an impressive lineup of general session speakers covering a range of topics, principally centered on the themes of change, discovery, and innovation.

THE IMPACT OF ATTENDING

I had the privilege of attending as APPA's international representative, joined by the Association of University Directors of Estates (AUDE) representative Mike Clark of Brighton University in the United Kingdom, and Vanessa Ranjit of the Tshwane University of Technology in South Africa, who represented the Higher Education Facilities Management Association (HEFMA). Mike, Vanessa, and I were asked to present as a panel to offer an international perspective on the state of higher education facilities management. I discussed how changes in finances, technology, demographics, and communications are having a transformative impact on how we conduct our business, and what is in store in the very near future.

The conference featured several concurrent breakout sessions aligned to specific themes. TEFMA gave me

the opportunity to present a session on Big Data and how the Internet of Things is reshaping our business via systems sensing and the emerging predictive analytics tools for building and plant operations. During my presentation, I noted that the same fault detection and diagnostics technology for building systems that we are applying at the University of Iowa is currently in place at Melbourne's airport.

During TEFMA's board meeting, I introduced myself and reinforced the valued partnership APPA enjoys with TEFMA, AUDE, and HEFMA. Mike, Vanessa, and I were asked to talk about our respective associations, institutions, and communities. I touched on how APPA enjoys a robust North American higher education member base, with participating institutions from Canada, the United States, and growing numbers of member institutions in Mexico. Natural disasters were of great interest to the board members, so I spoke of the dramatic and devastating flood that the University of Iowa campus experienced in 2008 and our long road to recovery. Having recently learned of Australians' generally high interest in American politics, I discussed the special role the Iowa Caucuses play every four years in the American presidential election process, and noted that every serious presidential contender visits the University of Iowa. Because Melbourne was the conference host city, I mentioned that in 2008, Melbourne and Iowa City were designated the second and third UNESCO Cities of Literature, and that at the time, those were the only cities in our respective countries with that designation (Seattle was designated last November).

LEARNING FROM VISITING

While in Australia, I had the opportunity to visit several universities. The University of Sydney, like many APPA institutions, features a rich mixture of historic and iconic buildings along with a cluster of more contemporary buildings. Its original campus was designed in the European, walled-in style of Oxford and Cambridge, which is a sharp contrast to the open, frontier campus design of the University of Iowa and the majority of American universities.

I visited the University of Melbourne and RMIT (Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology) while I was in Melbourne. These two urban institutions are in a city that has been designated several times as the “world’s most livable.” Having served two medical research universities during my tenure in higher education, I was particularly interested in learning that the University of Melbourne is one of the leading medical research campuses in the world.

However, the 4,000-student suburban campus of James Cook University in Cairns was particularly interesting. This campus was built in 1998, in a tropical setting located at the base of a national park and rainforest, is laid out in a “neighborhood” scheme with linear, covered walkways connecting its campus buildings and all parking on the perimeter. The buildings and grounds are immaculately clean and well-maintained. The campus boasts a state-of-the-art dental school teaching lab. Under construction is the school’s first residence hall, which is expected to change the character of the campus and breathe after-hours life to a setting that is normally quiet in the evenings.

REFLECTIONS

Several of the conference attendees commented on how much larger our in-house staffs are compared with theirs. I learned that outsourced service providers are the rule, not the exception, among institutions in Australia and New Zealand; this is a mature service delivery platform that gives them effective results. However, I could not help but reflect on the passion and pride that our employees show in providing personal service and stewardship to our beloved institutions. I also noticed that because TEFMA facilities organizations outsource their daily services, the character of the business-partner presence at their

conference was notably different from APPA’s.

At TEFMA’s Awards Dinner, I recalled that Australia and New Zealand once formed a region within APPA before breaking off to become a separate association. Jack Hug told me about the collaboration he had (as APPA president in the 1990s) with Maurie Pawsey to get TEFMA on a growth trajectory. I was delighted to meet Maurie at the conference. This was his first year back at TEFMA in over a decade. He was there to present the Maurie Pawsey Award to Kate Robertson from the University of the Sunshine Coast. The award provides up to \$10,000 toward the recipient’s attendance at either an AUDE, HEFMA, or APPA annual meeting. Of course, I was pleased Kate chose to attend APPA 2018 in Washington, D.C. I look forward to seeing her there, and to return the warm welcome that I was given by my new friends and colleagues Down Under. ☺

APPA President-Elect Don Guckert is associate vice president and director, facilities management, at the University of Iowa, Iowa City, IA, and can be reached at don-guckert@uiowa.edu.

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