HVAC Excellence Conference Educates the Educators

Industry Educators and Trainers Receive Valuable Lessons in Orlando

By Nick Kostora
May 18, 2015

ORLANDO, Fla. — More than 500 HVAC educators and trainers touched down in sunny Orlando, Florida, for the 2015 HVAC Excellence HVACR Educators and Trainers conference, March 15-17. Record high March temperatures for the city may have encouraged visitors to venture outside and visit Mickey Mouse at Disney World, but the focus inside the Florida Hotel & Conference Center was clearly on improving the learning process for industry students and ensuring instructors stay at the forefront of developing technologies and teaching techniques.

The conference featured a bevy of presentations, including award ceremonies, breakout lessons, general sessions, and a product exhibition with more than 70 showcasing companies. Educator credentialing exams were provided on-site as part of the conference, as was a class on programmatic...
accreditation.

David Boyd, vice president, Appion Inc., and Steve Coscia, president, Coscia Communications, started the conference by offering up a musical performance at the opening lunch session.

“What a great way to open the 2015 HVAC Excellence Conference,” said Richard Flores, Southwest Texas Junior College, Uvalde, Texas. “It was very original, and they did a great job.”

Additionally, one of the educators at the conference, Eugene Silberstein, Suffolk County Community College, Long Island, New York, helped lead a surprise ceremony recognizing the work Howard and Jerry Weiss have done in the HVAC industry.

**Extending Reach with Social Media**

Carter Stanfield, co-author, “Fundamentals of Refrigeration,” presented one of the conference’s most pertinent lessons on how best to extend your reach with social media. Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, and other networking sites are slowly being embraced by the industry, but Stanfield insisted the growth will continue.

“Social media is all about networking and that’s what we are all about at this conference,” said Stanfield. “Don’t be an island all to yourself. Start the networking right here, and continue the conversation on social media.”

Stanfield’s 1.5-hour PowerPoint presentation described an assortment of methods for managing and maintaining a social media presence. “The biggest mistake institutions make is they get someone to create a social media presence for them but don’t update content regularly,” said Stanfield. “Constant and consistent activity is critical.”

The PowerPoint proved to really just be a backdrop for a hearty discussion on what type of posts are best for each form of social media, how to incorporate texts and emails into proper business practices, and where blogs should be posted. “Facebook isn’t the place for lengthy posts you have to scroll through to read,” said Stanfield. “Keep those longer posts for a blog. If it takes too long to read on social media, people simply won’t read it.”

**HVAC and the Cloud**

One of the hottest topics throughout the HVAC industry is “the cloud.” The session conducted by Tim Burke, strategic marketing manager, White-Rodgers, had the audience fully involved as he explained how smart systems are changing the way the industry installs and services HVAC equipment. Burke was constantly turning to educators in the room and asking them how they have used Wi-Fi-enabled equipment in the past and where they see the future going.

“New players are entering the HVAC industry through the Internet of Things [IoT], and it’s turning the industry on its head,” said Burke. “The connected home is happening right now before our eyes, and the cloud allows users to remotely connect with anything and everything.

“The scary truth is, students know more about Wi-Fi, the cloud, and data applications than teachers
do,” said Burke. “Teachers may know crackerjack HVAC services, but they need to be able to understand and interpret data because, while consumers want to monitor their HVAC systems, they want HVAC dealers to maintain them.”

When one audience member asked how to address teachers and educators who simply don’t want to embrace these innovations, Burke highlighted how it’s simply their loss at this point.

“Quality of service has finally become more important than production rate,” said Burke. “We must create a sense of value and forward thinking in our students’ minds or they'll leave our programs and be unprepared for an HVAC career. That only hurts the industry as a whole.”

**Technology: The Great, the Good, and the Evil**

Christoper Molnar, curriculum director, Porter and Chester Institute, Stratford, Connecticut, led the longest session of the conference, which focused on how to go fully digital with a modern HVAC course curriculum.

Molnar fully described the transitions he’s already successfully been a part of and all the growing pains that come along with such a major switch in curriculum.

“At some point, every electronic device will have Internet access, and if students can’t bring a working knowledge of technology to the table, they are already behind the curve in the HVAC marketplace,” said Molnar.

The lesson broke down the ways in which tablets can become fully featured replacements for traditional textbooks, and how the devices go far beyond just being e-book readers.

“Making programs digital does a lot of great things,” said Molnar. “It reduces paper usage, centralizes learning, helps students embrace technological change, and also adds a certain ‘coolness factor’ to the whole thing.”

In what became a trend throughout the sessions offered at the conference, Molnar also highlighted how students tend to know more about technology than most instructors, but said good instructors will use this fact to their advantage and use it as a leveling device between themselves and students.

“The students with tons of technological experience can help those who are less experienced,” said Molnar. “New students can learn from students who have already been in the program for a while, and teachers can learn new aspects of technology they were previously unaware of.”

**Awards and Honors**

In addition to all the lessons learned in the individual sessions, several awards and honors were presented during the 2015 HVACR Educators and Trainers Conference.

HVAC Excellence recognized educational programs that were granted programmatic accreditation since the 2014 conference and instructors who earned the title of certified master HVACR educators.

For a full list of PowerPoint presentations, videos, and other information from the conference, visit

Next year’s conference is scheduled to take place March 21-23, 2016, at the South Point Hotel in Las Vegas.

Publication date: 5/18/2015

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