



The BAYWORK Open House at the SPUC lobby on February 19, 2014. (Photo by Ben Chan for the San Francisco Public Utilities Commission)

Over 300 attended BAYWORK Open House in February

By Kory Loucks-Powell

Over 300 students and job-seekers from as far away as the Sacramento area attended the BAYWORK Open House at the San Francisco Public Utilities Commission Headquarters on Wednesday, February 19th. The event was organized by the SFPUC and BAYWORK with 12 Bay Area utilities and the California-Nevada American Water Works Association represented.

BAYWORK is a collaborative of 19 water and wastewater utilities, two professional associations, and the Bay Area Community College Consortium, working together to ensure workforce reliability. - See more at baywork.org.

Michael Carlin, the SFPUC Deputy General Manager and Chief Operating Officer, addressed the job-seekers about the opportunities within the water and wastewater industry, citing anticipated job openings due to anticipated retirements. He observed that the SFPUC is a stable organization because it generates funds separate from taxes.

“We look for the rising stars,” Carlin stated. “Be motivated. A lot of people have advanced to very high levels by being motivated.” After the event Carlin said, “It was great. There was a really good turnout. It’s great to see.”

Presentations for youth and adults throughout the evening focused on mission-critical jobs in the water and wastewater industry. Speakers and topics included a welcome and introduction by Steve Currie, SFPUC Community Benefits Workforce Development Director; Skilled trades work by Steve Dennis, Alameda County Water District Emergency Services and Security Supervisor; and engineering work in

the water and wastewater industry by Annie Li, Senior Engineer, SFPUC Water Supply and Treatment Division.

Catherine Curtis, SFPUC Employment and Training Specialist, also gave a demonstration of the BAYWORK website, while Erin Tooch, Personnel Analyst, SFPUC Human Services Division, spoke about job hunting tips for jobs in the public sector.



The BAYWORK Open House at the SPUC lobby on February 19, 2014. (Photo by Ben Chan for the San Francisco Public Utilities Commission)

Phillip Chung of San Francisco and Haleemah Qureshi from Berkeley were impressed by the youth presentation. “There is a lot of influx of jobs coming in,” Chung, who is studying engineering in college, said. “I think that they are going in the right direction recruiting high school students this early.”

Qureshi, who is also in college studying engineering, agreed, saying that she thought the presentation was educational and interesting. “When I was in high school they didn’t have a program like this,” she said. “It was interesting to see high school students thinking that far ahead. It will be useful if there is a big gap coming up and they are going to need to fill all those jobs.”

During the evening, Carl Luckenbill, Chief Learning Officer with the SFPUC, told those in attendance to remember the number 54. “54 is the percentage of people who are eligible to retire for the SFPUC in the next 5 years,” Luckenbill said, “and as the economy continues to improve, more jobs will become available.”

Cheryl Davis, BAYWORK Chairperson, told the job-seekers that there are many different kinds of jobs in the utility industry. “Utilities are almost like cities,” Davis said. “We have so many different kinds of classifications, from accounting to administrative positions, and on our website we have job and internship listings.” Catherine Curtis, SFPUC Employment and Training Specialist, agreed, saying the BAYWORK.org website “has treasure trove of information for people who are looking for work.”

Hong Lam and Songrid Borriuxsaraban are attending the College of San Mateo and are hoping to get jobs working as electronic control technicians when they graduate. They both said that they enjoyed the BAYWORK Open House. "It's great," Lam said. "It opened our horizons to different water districts. I didn't know we had the many water districts in the Bay Area."

Rhonda Johnson Comte found out about the Open House through the Mission Hiring Hall in San Francisco and is studying to get her construction administration certificate. "It's fabulous," she said of the Open House. "It's so encouraging to see something like this, where people are understanding what opportunities there are in environmental protection and conservation. It feels like a niche that many people may be skilled and qualified to work in, but didn't consider as a career track. It think for all the people who have been here, some great opportunities will come out of it."

Samuel Smith from Citrus Heights came from the Sacramento area to see what opportunities there are for Operator in Training positions. Smith is currently an OIT at the Deer Creek Facility and is taking classes at the Folsom Lake College-El Dorado. He learned about the Open House on the BAYWORK.org website, which he uses regularly to find out about water and wastewater jobs, as well as events such as this one.



Over 300 job-seekers met with 12 Bay Area utilities and the California-Nevada American Water Works Association at the BAYWORK Open House on February 19, 2014. BAYWORK has 22 signatories (19 water/wastewater utilities, 2 professional associations, and the Bay Area Community College Consortium).

Smith said it is important to preserve and to meet with as many agencies as possible. His teachers and others in the industry also encouraged Smith to take advantage of any postings and open houses that are offered. "Don't be shy," Smith said. "You've got to apply for everything, so that is what made me drive all the way down here to check out these facilities."

Steve Dennis, Emergency Services and Security Supervisor with the Alameda County Water District, one of the five speakers who gave presentations throughout the evening, said he enjoyed the experience. "The mission of BAYWORK is really to get the message out to the people," Dennis said. "We bring the

industry to the people and let them have a chance to understand what it would be like to have an opportunity to work in the water and the wastewater industry. I had people who all wanted to be there on their own behalf. They weren't forced to be there. I got a lot of people asking questions afterwards. It was time well spent in my book."

Erin Tooch, Personnel Analyst with the SFPUC Human Services Division, told the job-seekers that getting a job in the public sector is different than the private sector, and often takes longer than expected. "On average it takes 200 days to go through the application process," Tooch said. "It can be daunting, but it is so worthwhile, so don't be discouraged."

Jaime Juarez, Greg Mitchell, and Anthony Tatum, came together from Pittsburg where they had worked in the printing industry for 30 years before the business closed. Now they are looking for new opportunities. "The plant that we worked for shut down so collectively we are looking for other jobs," Mitchell said. "I got a lot of information that otherwise I wouldn't have gotten, so it was worth taking the time to come down here."

Juarez said that he was surprised at the amount of opportunities available in water and wastewater in the Bay Area. "There are just a lot of jobs in this line of work available to us at very decent pay," he said. Tatum agreed, adding, "I wish I had known about this 10 or 15 years ago. It works for me."