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OCTOBER/NOVEMBER 2024

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*Designed by Emmett Jordan*

# SDA



Fall is a special time of year, and we hope your days are filled with celebration, fun, and treats!

We would also like to wish you and your loved ones a very Happy Thanksgiving! We are grateful for the opportunity to work with all of you as you continue to provide the best possible services to your local communities.





*SDA's CEO, Ann Terry, was thrilled to welcome this year's record crowd!*



## **Largest Attendance on Record at the 2024 SDA Annual Conference!**

**This year's SDA Annual Conference, September 10-12 at the Keystone Conference Center, was our biggest Conference ever!** We had 1,112 people join us in Keystone, and there were another 127 people participating on our virtual platform!



*The Welcome Breakfast on Tuesday morning included the Presentation of the Colors (above) and a beautiful rendition of the National Anthem sung by Lane Melott from Advance HOA Management (left).*





Chief TJ Steck from Elizabeth Fire Protection District provided his firsthand experience on gaining support from voters.



In his lively session, Eric Bergman from the Division of Local Government shared insights into how the Division helps communities thrive.



Mac Clemmens, the CEO of Streamline, led several valuable breakout sessions covering website accessibility, cybersecurity, and much more.



Micki Mills from CEGR Law was on hand for two timely and pertinent election-related sessions.



Jon Petz joined us for Wednesday's lunch, and his presentation, "Rules for Amazement," had a little bit of everything, from real time magic tricks to emotional stories.

This year we offered **40 breakout sessions** during the course of the three-day event, featuring **65 different speakers!** These speakers were from both district members and associate members, and their sessions covered a wide variety of topics, from very technical subjects to overarching issues that apply to all district types.

**Our five keynote speakers** were both educational and thought-provoking (please see pages 12-13 for the full run-down of their presentations). The keynote speakers were all very well received, and they were a great balance to our breakout sessions.

In addition to our keynote speakers, on Thursday morning we featured a



Thursday morning presented the unique opportunity to discuss property tax issues with a dedicated panel of experts.

**special panel discussion dedicated to property tax issues** (please see page 13 for more details). Our panel was moderated by Michael Valdez, SDA's Chief Governmental Affairs Officer and included Ann Terry, SDA's CEO; Chief Brad White from Grand Fire Protection District No.1;

Keith Erffmeyer from the Colorado Assessors' Association; and JoAnn Groff, Colorado's Property Tax Administrator. Each speaker provided a different perspective, and this was the perfect opportunity to host a focused, in-person discussion on this ever-important topic.

*Continued on page 7*

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# Justin Forsett



The audience at Tuesday's lunch was riveted by Justin Forsett's storytelling and motivational mindset of never giving up.

With our hybrid event, we were able to livestream not only our keynote speakers, but also all of our breakout sessions right to our virtual platform. This was a convenient way for folks to participate remotely, and it even made it possible for attendees in Keystone to sit outside or in a quiet place and still follow along with the sessions. And with everything being recorded, everyone who registered for Conference can now go back and access the recordings of the breakout sessions for a full year!

We once again had tremendous support from all of our sponsors and exhibitors (please see page 21 for the full listing). In addition to our **16 Platinum Sponsors**, we had a total of **17 Gold, 9 Silver, and 12 Bronze Sponsors** as well as **30 booth exhibitors!**

At the **Welcome Breakfast** on Tuesday morning, we were joined by members of the local **Honor Guard for the Presentation of the Colors**. We also enjoyed a beautiful rendition of the **National Anthem sung by Lane Melott from Advance HOA Management**.

At **Tuesday's Award Luncheon**, we had the honor of recognizing this year's **five very deserving districts, Board members, and managers** (please see pages 15-19 for the full write-up on each winner). Holding the Awards Luncheon on the first day of Conference is a perfect way for everyone to celebrate and recognize the winners throughout our time together, and we were thrilled to do that again this year.

For the second time we offered our **Discussion Forums** on Tuesday afternoon. They were so popular last year that we were pleased to



Wednesday's lunch presentation included a "levitation" where chairs were removed one by one until none were left! These brave volunteers kept their balance perfectly!



Allison Ulmer from Collins Cole Winn & Ulmer was one of the discussion leaders for the Discussion Forums on Tuesday afternoon.

have them on the schedule again this year! Each Forum focused on a specific topic, including building employee retention, finding your superpower as a new Manager or Executive Director, and navigating conflict. These discussions were once again led by experts in each of these areas, and we were thrilled to offer this dedicated time to focus on these important issues.

Following the Forums and the

*Continued on page 9*

## Congratulations to the 2024 James T. Walker Leadership Scholarship Winner!

SDA is pleased to congratulate Teresia Reed from Meeker Cemetery District as the 2024 James T. Walker Leadership Scholarship winner! Teresia was recognized as this year's winner during the recent SDA Annual Conference.

This leadership scholarship is presented in honor of James T. Walker, one of SDA's founding Board Members.

"We were pleased to choose Teresia as this year's winner," said Ann Terry, SDA's CEO. "She demonstrates SDA's high standard of leadership and is very deserving of this award."

Congratulations, Teresia!



*Sander Blackburn from the Northern Colorado Water Conservancy District (left) and Joe DePaepe from the CSD Pool enjoyed the roulette tables on Tuesday night.*



*Casino players were able to trade in their chips for prize drawing tickets at the Opening Night Celebration game night. Left to right are Juan Lacayo, Alex Terlecky, and Lei Shi from the CSD Pool who assisted with the chip-to-ticket exchange!*



*A group tried their luck at one of the many blackjack tables that were busy all night!*



*Nicki Simonson from Simonson & Associates was one of the big prize drawing winners!*



*Craps was another popular casino option!*



*The Opening Night Celebration on Tuesday night featured a full casino set up plus a complete musical trivia bingo game.*



Randall McKinnon provided the live entertainment for the Boots and BBQ event on Wednesday night.



There were also prize drawings with our sponsors and exhibitors on Wednesday night. Here Bob Krug from CSAFE waits to see whose name was drawn for their prize.



Sam Light from CIRSA was the featured keynote speaker at the CSD Pool's Annual Membership Meeting on Wednesday afternoon.



On Thursday morning, John Sileo hacked into an audience member's iPhone right on stage!

last breakout sessions of the day, our **Opening Night Celebration** and brand-new game night began! We had a **full casino set up, with poker, blackjack, roulette, and craps tables plus a complete musical trivia bingo game!** The casino tables were packed, and the musical trivia was very popular as well. There was even a drawing for prizes at the end of the night! And of course, lots of delicious food!

On Wednesday afternoon, the **Colorado Special Districts Property and Liability Pool's Annual Membership Meeting** featured a keynote presentation from Sam Light, the Deputy Executive Director and General Counsel for CIRSA.

**Wednesday evening once again featured the popular Boots and BBQ event.** Perennial favorite **Randall McKinnon** was on hand with his ever-popular live music, and there were prize drawings with our sponsors and exhibitors!

**The Grab-and-Go lunch on Thursday** was also back this year, and it was a convenient way for everyone to pick out their lunch and take it with them.

All in all it was a fantastic event, jam-packed with tons of beneficial training and plenty of opportunities to catch up with special district leaders from around the state.

## Unused Food from SDA Annual Conference Donated to Local Community

As everyone who attends our Annual Conference knows, we work hard to provide plenty of delicious food to our attendees throughout the day. But do you know what happens to the food that we don't use?

Last year we told you about a special partnership in place at the Keystone Conference Center where our untouched food that would otherwise be composted is donated to the local community. We are thrilled to announce that this year, over 77 pounds of unused food was picked up, packaged, and then utilized in the St. Johns Community Dinner.

"We are thrilled that the Keystone Conference Center was once again able to donate the food that we did not use for our event to help those in need," said Ann Terry, SDA's CEO.

Continued on page 11



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# Golden Jubilee Celebration!

September 16-18, 2025

Keystone, CO

Now we can't wait to do it all again next year! And 2025 is our 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary and Golden Jubilee so we will have a lot to celebrate! **Mark your calendars and plan to join us September 16-18 back up in Keystone!**



Conference photos by Kelly Shroads



## A Big Thank You to the SDA Annual Conference Volunteers!

Each year at Conference we are joined at the registration desk by a fantastic group of volunteers who all lend a hand to check people in, answer questions, and anything else that comes up. And this year was no different!

SDA's CEO, Ann Terry, was thrilled to see our volunteers again this year. "We are always grateful for this group of helpful and friendly folks who

assist our attendees in any way they can."

We would like to take a moment to say thank you to the 2024 Conference volunteers:

- » Molly Couture from Community Resource Services of Colorado (CRS)
- » Lane Melott from Advance HOA Management
- » Steve Ravel from Merrick & Company



*Our numerous sponsors and exhibitors were once again a huge part of this year's successful event!*

# 2024 Conference Keynote Speakers Were Insightful and Informative!

The keynote speakers at this year's Annual Conference were the perfect complement to the 40 breakout sessions that were offered over the course of the event!

**Pete Blank** kicked off this year's Conference on Tuesday morning with his entertaining presentation, **"Achieve Your 'Cultural Vision' through the Magic of 'Tele Vision.'"** Pete shared clips from popular TV shows and discussed the good and bad examples of organizational culture they represent. Moreover, he presented actionable ways for the audience to implement these lessons in their own districts. Pete's friendly demeanor and charismatic style were a great way to get this year's Conference going!



**At Tuesday's Awards Luncheon, we not only honored this year's annual award winners, but we also heard from former NFL running back, Justin Forsett.** In his captivating presentation, **"Greatness Grows Best in the Shadows,"** Justin shared his life story and inspirational messages about overcoming adversity, maintaining a positive mindset, and continually working hard to finally achieve success. The audience was riveted by Justin's storytelling and motivational mindset of never giving up.





Wednesday morning started off with **Sarita Maybin's** witty and relatable presentation, **"If You Can't Say Something Nice, What DO You Say?: Practical Solutions for Working Together Better."** In her talk, Sarita asked the audience to think about a current difficult conversation they may need to have. She then encouraged each person to discuss the specifics about the situation with a fellow audience member to really think through all the angles and decide whether or not it is something that should be addressed. All along the way, she offered valuable tools on things such as positive communication phrases and how to have "constructive confrontation." Sarita had everyone laughing and learning at the same time!



**Jon Petz** joined us at Wednesday's lunch, and his presentation, **"Rules for Amazement,"** had a little bit of everything. From amazing magic tricks (how did that \$100 bill get into the bag of lemons?) to an emotional story of how Jon touched the life of a young magic fan and his family, Jon reminded everyone of the importance of not thinking that you are "just" one thing or another. Through moments of joy, sadness, and wonder, Jon demonstrated that everyone has the capacity for the amazement effect.

**We wrapped up Conference with a special discussion panel dedicated to property tax issues.** This was a perfect opportunity to hear directly from a variety of experts on the ongoing situation with property taxes and what it means for districts across the state. Our panel featured Ann Terry, SDA's CEO; Chief Brad White from Grand Fire Protection District No.1; Keith Erffmeyer from the Colorado Assessors' Association; and JoAnn Groff, Colorado's Property Tax Administrator.



Our last day of Conference began with **John Sileo's** eye-opening presentation, **"Blockbuster Cybersecurity in a Zero Trust World."** Utilizing the potent lessons he learned from losing everything to cybercrime and his decades of real-world experience, John shared a variety of pertinent tools and procedures for improved personal and professional cyber defense.



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# Congratulations to the 2024 SDA Annual Award Winners!

The 2024 SDA Annual Awards Luncheon took place during the recent Annual Conference, and it was once again a wonderful opportunity to honor outstanding districts, Board members, and Managers.



*Parker Water and Sanitation District was thrilled to accept their 2024 Safety District of the Year award.*

The first award was presented to **Parker Water and Sanitation District** as the winner of the Colorado Special Districts Property and Liability Pool's **2024 Safety District of the Year Award**.

The team at Parker Water and Sanitation has demonstrated their strong commitment to loss control, risk management, and life safety through their continued engagement with trainings, inspections, and other risk mitigating services. From the first time the CSD Pool's Safety and Loss Prevention team visited their organization, it was apparent that their team takes safety and risk management seriously.

Since that first visit, Parker Water and Sanitation has grown their safety program through rigorous policy

development, extensive trainings, including ergonomic assessments, and a focus on creating internal engagement. Through the creation of their Safety Advisory Council, they maintain and grow a collaborative safety culture that works for all departments and keeps all employees and managers "bought-in" and engaged with safety. The District has also implemented a "Close Call Reporting Program," utilizing *Vector EHS* to track near misses and catch issues before they result in a loss. They have also encouraged other districts to be health and safety leaders, such as when they invited four other districts to attend an on-site CDOT flagger training that was being conducted by the CSD Pool.



*SDA's CEO Ann Terry was honored to recognize Yvonne Fischbach for her years of dedicated service.*

Even with this list of accomplishments, the team at Parker Water and Sanitation is always seeking ways to improve. They continue to grow by championing the use of CSD Pool's safety and loss prevention resources, such as OnSolve's emergency notification platform and Vector's Learning Management System, where every employee is required to complete an online course in emergency response.

This year we also had the opportunity to recognize **Yvonne Fischbach** for her **years of dedicated service** to **Hyland Hills Park and Recreation District**.

Yvonne has been a critical asset to Hyland Hills Park and Recreation District throughout her 38-year professional career, notably serving as the District's first female Executive Director. Her extensive involvement in all aspects of the District's growth and success reflects her deep passion and commitment to the District. Yvonne has significantly contributed by establishing robust financial policies that ensure the District's economic stability and long-term sustainability. Additionally, her strategic restructuring of

*Continued on page 16*

the leadership team has led to improvements in departmental management, enhancing service delivery, operational efficiency, planning, and overall direction for the District.

Following the retirement of the District's previous Executive Director after 40 years of service, Yvonne has worked tirelessly to elevate Hyland Hills to a premier park and recreation district. Her leadership during the COVID-19 pandemic was pivotal, enabling the District to reassign employees and maintain full-time staff levels without reductions. Yvonne's financial stewardship ensured the District had sufficient reserves to weather the pandemic's economic challenges. She adeptly managed the construction and operational challenges of the new Hyland Hills Sports Center, addressing issues related to construction and supply chain disruptions. Additionally, she navigated complex lease negotiations for two on-site restaurants, successfully renewing one lease and bringing the second lease in-house to operate the Cottonwood Lodge.

Yvonne has effectively promoted team engagement by offering opportunities for input on the work environment and encouraging rapport-building methods across the District. She is quick to recognize the contributions of others and values collaboration with a team of highly motivated professionals. Her efforts have fostered a workplace where employees feel valued and are driven to perform exceptionally. This has resulted in a high rate of long-term commitment among the Hyland Hills staff. Yvonne's strengths in listening, problem-solving, and communication significantly contribute to her success in creating a positive and productive work environment.

Yvonne's strategic thinking and unwavering commitment have also been demonstrated during her decade of service with the Colorado Special Districts Property and Liability Board, where she currently serves as Vice President. Her impact

has been profound, and we eagerly anticipate her continued contributions in the years ahead.



*Ann Terry congratulates Randy Ray as he accepts his Manager of the Year award.*

Next we were pleased to honor this year's **Manager of the Year Award** winner, **Randy Ray from the Central Colorado Water Conservancy District.**

Randy embarked on his professional journey with Central Colorado Water Conservancy District (CCWCD) in 1991, initially serving as an intern for a year before completing his bachelor's degree in Agronomy from Colorado State University in 1992. Subsequently, he transitioned into the role of Field Operations Assistant at the District, where he took charge of a diverse array of groundwater recharge projects, surface water diversions, and maintained extensive communication with constituents. His dedication and expertise led to his promotion to Operations Manager in 2002, a pivotal time for Central as it faced challenges related to water rights restrictions and the metering of 1,000 wells within the subdistrict. Randy's leadership and commitment to the cause were further demonstrated when he assumed the role of Assistant Manager in 2010 and then Executive Director in 2011.

Between 2001 and 2010, Randy,

along with the Board and staff of the District, encountered significant challenges related to water supply. More than 1,000 irrigation wells were compelled to reduce or completely halt pumping, leading to a surge in legal and political pressures. This necessitated the exploration of innovative approaches for groundwater recharge and the implementation of gravel pit storage projects.

Randy's proficiency in overseeing large-scale construction endeavors played a pivotal role in enabling Central and its subdistricts to execute the development and construction of numerous acre-feet of new reservoirs and recharge projects. These initiatives have resulted in the augmentation of water supplies, thereby enhancing the dependability of water provision for Central's members.

Under Randy's guidance, other significant milestones have also been achieved, including the approval of the "de-brucing" of the Groundwater Management Subdistrict and the successful securing of a \$60 million dollar bond for water supplies and storage. Additionally, Randy's instrumental role in obtaining voter approval for the "de-brucing" of CCWCD and a mill levy override in 2014 further solidified his impact on the organization's growth and development.

In 2018, Randy spearheaded the initiative to secure voter approval for a \$48.7 million bond and secured permission to borrow funds from the Colorado Water Conservation Board (CWCB). Subsequently, CWCB sanctioned a \$40 million loan to enhance water supplies, enabling Central's wells to extract much-needed groundwater for irrigation. Additionally, he successfully secured various federal grants to support the construction of the Robert W. Walker Recharge Project, a groundbreaking endeavor aimed at replenishing 30,000 acre-feet of water to the South Platte Basin aquifer. Randy also fostered a partnership with the Town of Wiggins

to facilitate the utilization of certain aspects of the Project to address their water requirements. Furthermore, he facilitated the use of part of the Project's infrastructure to the Orphan Wells of Wiggins, a non-profit agricultural augmentation group that operates for the benefit of irrigation wells in Morgan County.

In his capacity as the Executive Director, Randy has also expanded his network of associations to work with a diverse array of irrigation, municipal, and environmental organizations. This collaborative effort has been instrumental in the formulation and delivery of additional water supplies for the benefit of the members of Central through a variety of notable projects, including the Chatfield Reservoir Reallocation Project in south Denver. Central acquired a water right in 1983 to store water in the recreational reservoir. When the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) announced the availability of additional water storage space for irrigation and municipal water uses, Central engaged in negotiations with various water users to secure the storage space. Randy actively participated in trips to Washington, D.C. with the Colorado Water Conservation Board, the Greenway Foundation, and other groups to meet with the USACE and Colorado's Congressional delegation, ultimately leading to the successful storage of additional water in Chatfield Reservoir in May 2020. Following this achievement, Randy was elected as the President of the Chatfield Mitigation Company by unanimous vote, highlighting his leadership and expertise in overseeing the operation of the new water storage deliveries.

Randy possesses a remarkable talent for creating a warm and inclusive atmosphere for everyone he interacts with. He has a genuine interest in what others have to say, actively listening and responding with care and consideration. Growing up in the District, Randy has developed an extensive

understanding of agriculture and Colorado's intricate water systems. His knowledge of the South Platte River, its tributaries, and the network of ditches in Northeastern Colorado is unparalleled.

Known by nearly everyone in the community, Randy values the relationships he has built and actively seeks input and guidance from Board members, constituents, and other stakeholders. Randy's forward-thinking approach is evident in his vision for addressing the future needs of water users in the District and the staff at Central. With his expertise and dedication, Randy is well-equipped to lead initiatives that will benefit the community for years to come.



*Dr. Mike Brooks proudly accepts his Board Member of the Year award.*

Turning to our **Board Member of the Year Award**, we were proud to honor **Dr. Mike Brooks from Grand Fire Protection District No.1** as this year's winner.

Dr. Brooks has served on the Board of Directors of Grand Fire Protection District No.1 since 1994 and has been the Board Treasurer since 1998.

Dr. Brooks has played a crucial role in the growth and development of Grand Fire, especially during the transition from a small agricultural community to a bustling rural resort community.

With a significant increase in residents and visitors, his leadership on the Board has been instrumental in navigating various challenges and opportunities that have arisen.

During his tenure, Dr. Brooks has successfully managed multiple complex projects, including mill ballot issues, TABOR and Gallagher questions, district inclusions, fire station constructions, engine purchases, and supporting Fire Chiefs. His dedication and hard work have not only improved response times and enhanced the quality of the response staff, but they have also led to the District achieving an impressive ISO (Insurance Services Office) fire protection class rating of 3. This achievement has not only elevated the overall safety and security of the community, but has also resulted in substantial cost savings for property owners within the District. Dr. Brooks's contributions have been invaluable in shaping the organization's success and ensuring that it continues to thrive in the face of evolving challenges and opportunities.

Dr. Brooks, a local veterinarian, is deeply ingrained in the community and is known for his problem-solving skills. He has earned a reputation for being a voice of reason, always willing to support the initiatives taken on by the Board and District. Dr. Brooks has a strong commitment to thinking outside the box and finding innovative solutions to enhance services while also sharing the financial burden. His dedication was evident in the establishment of a jointly owned fire station with East Grand Fire Protection District near Snow Mountain Ranch in 2007. Known as the Red Dirt Fire Station, Dr. Brooks continues to play an active role in the Joint Operating Committee, working closely with staff and Board Members from East Grand Fire to ensure that both districts benefit from shared resources, including fire apparatus and personnel. His unwavering dedication to the community and his passion for finding creative

*Continued on page 18*

solutions make him an invaluable asset to the District.

In addition to his contributions to the Red Dirt Fire Station, Dr. Brooks played a crucial role in the planning, funding, and completion of the new Bud Wilson Station. This station not only enhances emergency response capabilities on the north side of the District but also accommodates the seasonal wildland team, a Colorado Division of Fire Prevention and Control Wildland Module, and Grand County Search and Rescue. Strategically situated near the Arapahoe National Recreation Area and U.S. Forest Lands, the Bud Wilson Station serves as a central hub for these organizations, providing essential services to both residents and visitors. By bringing together these entities under one roof, the station exemplifies collaboration and efficiency in serving the community's needs.

Moreover, like many other expanding organizations, the District has faced the challenges of implementing new programs, adjusting policies, altering routines, and evolving staff needs. Dr. Brooks has consistently made an effort to engage with volunteers who wished to discuss the changes and the organization's direction, while also considering the needs and concerns of the community. During a critical period, Dr. Brooks assumed a leadership role in a hiring committee, where he played a key part in identifying the qualifications and characteristics required for new leadership within the District. Furthermore, Dr. Brooks demonstrated a strong commitment to the subsequent strategic planning processes by incorporating historical data and highlighting changes in the community, all in an effort to develop an agency that is appropriately sized for the community and its anticipated growth.

By actively participating in strategic planning and leveraging his understanding of the community's history and evolving dynamics, Dr. Brooks has played a pivotal role in shaping the District's future trajectory. His leadership and



*Ann Terry was thrilled to present Elizabeth Fire Protection District with their District of the Year award. From left to right are Division Chief Kara Gerczynski, Board President Rick Young, Board Director Stacey Collis, and Fire Chief TJ Steck.*

commitment to aligning the organization with the community's needs and growth potential have been vital in ensuring the District's continued success.

Dr. Brooks has been an invaluable resident in the community for many years, contributing to its growth. His quiet, calm, and thoughtful demeanor has been instrumental in fostering conversations that explore new ideas and find sensible solutions. His commitment to using tax funds responsibly has led to a phased approach to various capital projects, enabling the District to be more responsive to economic fluctuations. Dr. Brooks is truly a treasure to Grand Fire Protection District No.1 and the entire community.

We were pleased to present our final award to **Elizabeth Fire Protection District** as the **2024 J. Evan Goulding District of the Year**.

The J. Evan Goulding District of the Year Award was established by the SDA Board of Directors to recognize a district's major accomplishments, series of outstanding efforts, and a steady determination to serve its constituency. This year's winner, Elizabeth Fire Protection District, truly exemplifies these qualities.

The Elizabeth Fire Department was established in 1947 after the

fire at Jones Motor Company, which threatened the entire east end of the town of Elizabeth. In the years that followed, the local population continued to grow, and it was no longer possible to fund the department with donations. As a result, in 1977, the fire department became a tax-based individual district called the Elizabeth Fire Protection District.

Elizabeth Fire is a combination department consisting of full-time staff, part-time staff, reserve volunteers, and support services volunteers. The District serves 111 square miles in northwest Elbert County, including the town of Elizabeth. The District responds to 1,400 calls a year out of three fire stations, and the average response time is approximately seven minutes.

The District provides numerous services to the community including public education, fire prevention, fire suppression, hazardous materials mitigation, emergency medical services, and countless public assists. Elizabeth Fire also provides mutual aid to law enforcement agencies within the District as well as to neighboring fire agencies. Public education programs include monthly readings to preschool classes, babysitting classes for kids ages 11-16, cooking safety for high school classes, and community CPR classes. Crews

help conduct safety drills for the many schools within the District as well as providing yearly business inspections to ensure the safety of local businesses. Crews are active in many community events, such as spraying water for kids during school field days, participating in town parades, and providing EMS services to the community rodeo. Citizens are also invited to learn about the daily life of a District firefighter by participating in the District's educational ride-along program, which gives community members the opportunity to ride-along on a District vehicle for the day. In addition, Elizabeth Fire's yearly Academy, which provides new reserve volunteers with the opportunity to obtain both Firefighting and HazMat Operations certifications, is well-known for equipping recruits with the skills needed to be an excellent firefighter, and many departments are quick to recruit from the Academy graduates.

Elizabeth Fire's core values—Safety, Customer Service, Professionalism, Progressiveness, and Ownership—are evident in every aspect of their operations. Whether it's an interaction between a firefighter and a community member or performing simple daily tasks to maintain the professional upkeep of District apparatus and stations, these core standards are valued first and foremost for every member of the District, whether full-time, part-time, or volunteer.

The District's Board of Directors and staff also work collaboratively to ensure a consistent vision, and they strive to incorporate all stakeholders' concerns through a committee-based decision-making process. This method has played a role in the District's operational planning with the implementation of a purchasing committee, and it is currently being used in the process to update the District's strategic plan.

As part of their commitment to fiscal responsibility, Elizabeth Fire continually works to provide competitive salaries and excellent benefits programs to its employees.

Updated equipment is provided through the assistance of grant programs, including regional grants with other fire districts. Earlier this year, the District was awarded the regional Assistance to Firefighter (AFG) grant in partnership with four neighboring fire districts. This grant provides all five districts with new standardized Self-Contained Breathing Apparatus (SCBAs) which are essential to providing safe, breathable air to firefighting crews during an emergency. This grant is just one example of the unique partnerships the District has fostered with neighboring agencies.

Moreover, Elizabeth Fire is always on the lookout for new ways to expand services to the community, including the implementation of the single role paramedic/EMT program, the water supply unit, and the expansion of the overall part-time program. Elizabeth Fire even employs a volunteer meteorologist who provides critical weather information for the District's immediate jurisdiction. As part of the District's community outreach, Elizabeth Fire has begun utilizing staff to create entertaining and informational social media safety messages that are both engaging and relevant to current issues.

In addition, in 2005, the District created a 501(c)(3) foundation to help community members with financial assistance in times of need, for higher education scholarships, and for other funding needs that could not be provided by the District itself with taxpayer dollars. The foundation, known as the Elizabeth Firefighters Community Foundation, puts on several fund-raising events that bring local residents together throughout the year, such as summer pancake breakfasts and chili roasting events.

In the past several years, Elizabeth Fire has collaborated with the Foundation to utilize private corporation funding to develop statewide training programs to benefit current and aspiring fire leaders throughout the state of Colorado. An innovative example of this is the Colorado Fire Leadership

Series, which consists of monthly, online training modules and was created using funding from Google. A different subject is discussed every month, including topics such as foundations of leadership; empowerment and accountability; and cultures of excellence, just to name a few. This online training is available free of charge to fire leaders across Colorado, and it has proven to be very popular, with approximately 150-200 attendees per session. Funding has also added critical mobile data units and training to all rural fire agencies in Elbert County. Additionally, wild-land mitigation programs, personal protective equipment, and training to rural agencies statewide have been supported by various funding that has been received.

Furthermore, Elizabeth Fire has been instrumental in the creation of a group of local government leaders who meet regularly to collaborate and coordinate services to the community as a whole. This group, known as CLAMS (Community Leaders and Area Managers), has worked together on a variety of projects, including their recent discussions to develop a consolidated fleet fueling system for multiple agencies in the local area.

Elizabeth Fire's innovative programs, like the Colorado Fire Leadership Series funded by Google, as well as their instrumental role in local government collaboration, highlight the District's commitment to excellence and community well-being. Moreover, from the invaluable support they offer through their foundation to their values-driven approach to day-to-day operations, the Elizabeth Fire Protection District embodies a steadfast dedication to its citizens and an unwavering commitment to the best interests of their community.

**The SDA Board of Directors and staff would like to congratulate all the 2024 award winners!**



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# Sponsors and Exhibitors Play a Key Role in the Success of the 2024 SDA Annual Conference!

SDA would like to extend a sincere thank you to all of this year's sponsors and exhibitors! From the 16 Platinum Sponsors to the numerous Gold, Silver, and Bronze Sponsors as well as all of our exhibitors, these fantastic organizations were a huge part of this year's success.

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## Making the Most of Your CSD Pool Membership With...

# Driver Training and Motor Vehicle Reporting

Guest article by the Colorado Special Districts Property and Liability Pool

The Colorado Special Districts Property and Liability Pool (CSD Pool) remains committed to our more than 2,500 public entities as *Your Risk Management Partner*. Each month, we are focusing on a different program or service we offer our membership, either at no-cost or at a discounted rate. This month's highlight is on our driver training resources and motor vehicle reporting services.

### SKIDTRUCK & SKIDCAR Driver Training

SKIDTRUCK and SKIDCAR offer a revolutionary system that allows those who drive vehicles on the job, whether larger vehicles such as small buses, fire engines, ambulances, or large pickup trucks/SUVs, or smaller vehicles, such as police cars or maintenance vehicles, to simulate how to drive in inclement weather conditions where loss of traction is a constant risk.

Training takes place at the Adams County Fairgrounds. But we can also bring it to you! We can perform the training on any concrete pad that is at least 200 feet by 500 feet and is free of obstructions like light poles.

There are four core missions to this unique driver training to help participants become more disciplined drivers:

- » Vehicle Dynamics
- » Gaining Awareness of Vehicle Technology
- » Grip: Demonstrated in the classroom as well as behind the wheel
- » Speed: Higher speeds will reduce visual efficiency. Demonstrated in the classroom and behind the wheel.

Training is available as a four- or two-hour course. To schedule a time and date to train, send an email to [safety@csdpool.org](mailto:safety@csdpool.org) or visit [csdpool.org/safety/skidtruck](https://csdpool.org/safety/skidtruck) to view available dates.

### SambaSafety Motor Vehicle Reporting

The CSD Pool has partnered with SambaSafety to offer continuous motor vehicle reporting (MVR) to all eligible members. MVRs are one of the most effective tools to manage the risk of automobile use by members and must be obtained at least annually to determine if re-training, removal, or restriction of driving responsibilities may be necessary for drivers.

Running MVRs annually is a time-intensive and expensive process that still does not give



you accurate information throughout the year. Continuous monitoring is real-time and minimizes the administrative burden. Continuous monitoring alerts you when one of your drivers receives a violation, giving you the opportunity to take immediate action.

This service is available to eligible members for free. Read our FAQ on MVRs at [csdpool.org/safety/mvr](https://csdpool.org/safety/mvr)

### Vector Solutions Driver Training Courses

We partner with Vector Solutions to bring your district all-in-one online driver training and assessments that provide interactive video exercises. First-person perspective puts trainees in the driver's seat, while in-depth feedback explains scenarios and identifies gaps in training. The training program is intuitive and hands-off for administrators. Courses are auto assigned and self-maintaining.

In addition, the Vector Solutions training platform offers a variety of different driver training courses for members with fleet programs such as:

- » Defensive Driving Strategies
- » Accidents and Emergencies
- » Driver Safety Orientation
- » Safe Backing
- » Safety for Large Vehicle Drivers
- » Adjusting to Changing Conditions
- » And much more

All these courses are **available to members for free** by signing up for Vector Solutions on our website at [csdpool.org/training](https://csdpool.org/training).

### Your Risk Management Partner

As *Your Risk Management Partner*, we remain committed to providing specialized coverages tailored for public entities, exemplary claims support, and safety and loss prevention services to ensure everyone within the organization—from Board members to supervisors and staff—has the tools they need to succeed. If you have any questions about the resources mentioned here, please visit [csdpool.org](https://csdpool.org) or email us at [info@csdpool.com](mailto:info@csdpool.com). 🍷

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# Have You Ever Thought About Joining the SDA Leadership Academy?

The planning process is well underway for the 2025 SDA Leadership Academy, which will kick-off early next year! And we are pleased to announce that you will soon be able to apply to join this unique group!

SDA believes that leadership development can be fostered throughout every level of an organization, and it was this idea which led to the creation of the SDA Leadership Academy in 2012. Today, over 610 Leadership Fellows have graduated from this year-long program that features a variety of speakers discussing issues centered around personal and professional development.

As a Leadership Academy Fellow, you will participate in at least four events throughout the year plus the SDA Annual



SDA Leadership Academy



Conference in Keystone in September if you are able to join us. We will also host a series of online meetups to discuss leadership hot topics, and you'll receive weekly emails which offer keen insights and real-world lessons from a wide variety of sources. Moreover, our Fellows are able to connect with other special

district leaders from across the state, creating a strong network of support for each other.

**Applications will be available soon so please watch your emails and visit the SDA website at [www.sdaco.org](http://www.sdaco.org) if you are interested in applying.** The class will be limited to 45 people, which is a great size for group conversations and interactions.

"This popular training fills up quickly so don't miss this remarkable opportunity," said Ann Terry, SDA's CEO. "We look forward to receiving your applications and welcoming our next class of Leadership Fellows!"

We would like to thank COLOTRUST for sponsoring the 2025 Leadership Academy, which is sure to be another exciting year of education and growth.

## 2025 SDA Membership Renewal Opening Soon...Online Only!

**It's that time of year again! The 2025 SDA membership renewals will open in mid-November** so watch your emails and the SDA website for all the information. (Remember, the entire renewal process is done online; we won't send paper invoices.)

**And here's the best part: if you are a district and you renew by March 1, 2025 (and pay by July 1, 2025), you will receive a 25% discount! It's that simple!**

Don't miss out! Renewing is quick and easy. Once the renewals open, simply go to the SDA website at [www.sdaco.org](http://www.sdaco.org) (and if you're a district, remember to have your 2025 budget information handy as you go through the process).

If you have any questions or need any assistance, please feel free to contact Karla Boughey, Membership Services Coordinator, at 303-863-1733.

## Announcing the 2025 DEO Election Series!

We are excited to kick off the 2025 DEO Election Series!

**The first class is scheduled for Wednesday, December 4 at 11:30 am via Zoom.** This session will cover everything you need to know as a Designated Election Official (DEO) to prepare for the May 2025 elections. We will walk through the essential steps to take before and during January and February 2025 to ensure a smooth election process.

Please mark your calendars and stay tuned for more details. We look forward to having you join us!



# What is the Latest Status of the Federal Special District Grant Accessibility Act (H.R. 7525)?

*Guest article by Chantal Unfug from the National Special Districts Coalition (NSDC)*

**W**e hope you have been thinking about H.R. 7525 and have continued to get your special district partners to sign on. We are excited to tell you over 24,816 special districts and partners are supporting our collective efforts and more join daily. Our goal is to get 25,000 signatories so don't slow down; we are almost there!

Here is the latest status: the bipartisan Special District Grant Accessibility Act (SDGAA; H.R. 7525) was introduced by Representatives Pat Fallon (R-TX) and Brittany Pettersen (D-CO) on March 5 and passed by the full House on an overwhelming 352-27 vote. On July 11, Senators Kyrsten Sinema (I-AZ) and John Cornyn (R-TX) introduced an identical companion bill to H.R. 7525 (the Senate bill number is S. 4673). The Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee approved the legislation on a 10-1 vote in late July. The SDGAA (H.R. 7525) is currently awaiting consideration by the full Senate. The sponsors of the bill — Senators Sinema and Cornyn — are working to ensure that the legislation will receive a vote during the upcoming post-election, lame-duck session of Congress.

If you are new to this issue, or need speaking points for your outreach, the SDGAA will do the following:

1. Establish a first-ever, formal definition of “special district” in federal law; and,
2. Require the White House Office of Management and Budget (OMB) to issue guidance to federal agencies requiring special districts to be recognized as local governments for the purpose of federal financial assistance determinations. Federal agencies would have one year to implement OMB's guidance.

The primary impetus for H.R. 7525 was the exclusion of special districts in COVID-19 pandemic-era legislation that provided direct federal financial assistance to local governments for coronavirus relief activities (i.e., CARES Act funding and American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) Fiscal Recovery Fund dollars). Special districts were essentially excluded from these bills despite the fact that districts provided essential public services throughout the COVID-19 pandemic — including ambulance/EMS, hospital, and open space services.

Special districts are ineligible for — or have barriers to accessing — federal grant programs due to the fact that the U.S. Census Bureau does not recognize special districts as geographic units of government due to the absence of a formal statutory definition. Not having population-based figures precludes special districts from receiving certain formula-driven programs.

A formal definition of “special district” will foster consistency and enhance special districts' access to federal programs, including programs that provide resources for constructing and protecting critical infrastructure. Moreover, having a formal definition of special districts codified in law would help facilitate the inclusion of special districts in future legislative efforts, particularly those that are designed to reauthorize or create new grant programs.

Examples of program ineligibility/barriers to access include:

- » Transportation Alternatives / Rails-to-Trails: Many local park districts are not able to access the U.S. Department of Transportation's (USDOT) Transportation Alternatives (TA) program, as special districts are not Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs)/do not meet USDOT's TA eligibility criteria.
- » USDOT's Reconnecting Communities Program: Special districts are not listed in the program guidance as eligible entities. However, DOT staff has advised that special districts could qualify as a unit of local government or a non-profit organization depending upon how the district is structured.
- » U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Rural Housing Preservation Grants: Similar to the aforementioned example, USDA staff has expressed uncertainty regarding special district eligibility for this grant program.
- » U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) Clean-Heavy Duty Vehicles Program: Special districts are not explicitly listed as eligible entities in the program guidance, and it remains unclear if districts qualify under the program's “municipality” umbrella.
- » The Public Service Loan Forgiveness Program through the U.S. Department of Education: Employees of certain special districts have been unable to access program benefits, which are intended for individuals who work for government agencies

Join me in thanking Paragon Government Relations for continuing to work very closely with Senators Sinema, Cornyn, and other supporters in an effort to ensure that the SDGAA is passed by the full Senate and enacted into law. They keep us updated weekly so if you have any questions, don't hesitate to contact Chantal Unfug, [chantalu@nationalspecialdistricts.org](mailto:chantalu@nationalspecialdistricts.org). 🍋



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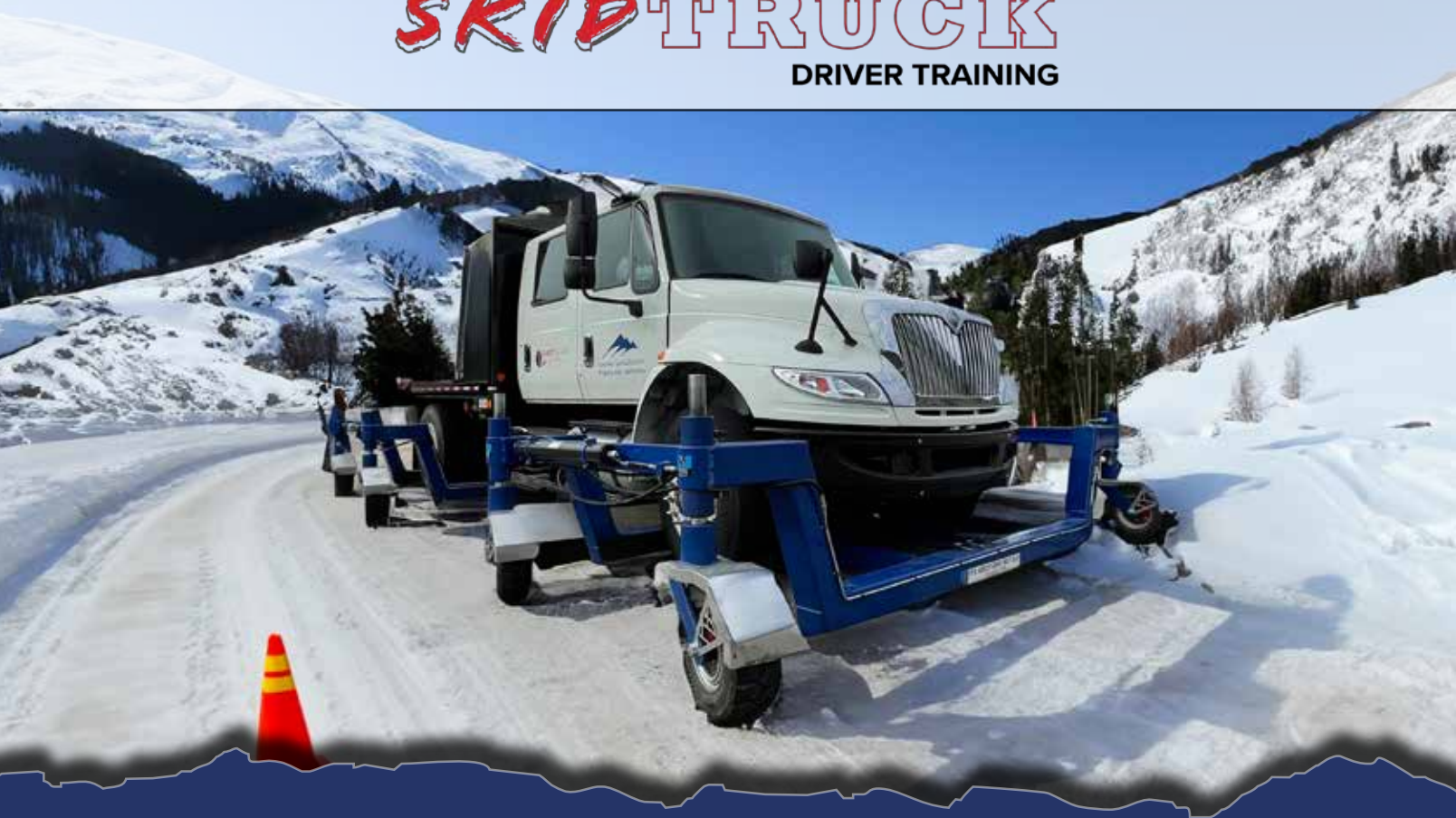


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