

U.S. Hydro 2007

Norfolk, Virginia, a city that has played a major role in US maritime history, was the venue for U.S. Hydro 2007. Two hundred years after the founding of the US Coast Survey, and four hundred after the establishment in nearby Jamestown, Virginia of the first permanent English settlement in America, this eleventh biennial U.S. Hydrographic Conference honoured these celebrations. It featured a forward-looking theme centred on the latest developments in ocean-mapping technology.

U.S. Hydro 2007 took place from 15th to 17th May 2007 at the Sheraton Norfolk Waterside Hotel on Norfolk's River Elizabeth waterfront. The Waterside complex, just upriver of the Norfolk container port and overlooking busy shipyards, is a popular marina, tourist, restaurant and shopping area. This hotel has been the site of several U.S. Hydro Conferences and once again provided an ideal setting for the event. The hotel had a well laid-out exhibition area, technical sessions and special-topic workshops. The adjacent Waterside Marina provided the necessary berthing for several on-water demonstrations by conference exhibitors.

Attendance

These conferences continue to attract a large number of participants, with government, private-sector and academia all contributing. U.S. Hydro 2007 had 478 registered delegates from fourteen countries, all regions of the world being represented.

Opening Session

Conference opened with traditional greetings from the US and Canadian National Hydrographers, enlivened this year by a two-hundredth anniversary gift of an original commemorative painting presented to the U.S. Coast Survey from the Canadian Hydrographic Service by a hydrographer in early nineteenth-century seagoing attire. This recognition of the history of hydrography set the stage for the highlight of the opening session, a keynote speech by Dr Robert Ballard. Ballard, the renowned ocean scientist and explorer who discovered the Titanic, delivered a riveting and inspiring address on "Ocean Exploration - Past, Present and Future" that set an energising tone for the whole conference. In sharing his enthusiasm for ocean science and exploration Ballard challenged delegates to engage today's youth, get them interested in maths and science, and encourage them to become our future oceanographers and hydrographers.

Technical Programme

The technical programme for this conference was among the strongest of any hydrographic conference in memory, with a concentration on new technological developments. The breadth of topics was also notable, sessions being devoted to data processing, interferometry, marine archaeology, Lidar, back-scatter, habitat mapping, vertical reference, electronic charting, and marine boundaries, among other topics. The high quality and diversity of the technical programme resulted in well-attended sessions throughout the conference, and some spirited exchanges of opinion during question-and-answers. In addition to the technical presentations the programme included a popular poster session, with authors standing by to discuss their projects.

Workshops

U.S. Hydro conferences are distinguished by their inclusion of training and discussion workshops. The workshops at U.S. Hydro 2007, which ran concurrently with technical sessions, attracted a large number of delegates. These workshops led by acknowledged experts in the subject focused on the application of operational technology. In addition to their training content, the workshops provided opportunities for experience sharing among working hydrographers.

Exhibition

The conference had a very solid exhibition hall, conveniently located adjacent to the technical session and workshop rooms. Fifty-five exhibitors, including hydrographic survey companies, software and equipment providers, government agencies and universities, were represented. In addition to the stands in the hall, several exhibitors offered on-water demonstrations of their hydrographic systems and sensors. NOAA's primary Atlantic-coast survey vessel, NOAA Ship Thomas Jefferson was moored nearby, offering delegates guided tours and demonstrations of hydrographic systems.

Social Events

No hydrographic conference is complete without a social programme, and U.S. Hydro included an Icebreaker Social the evening before formal opening and an Exhibitor Social on the evening of 15th May. The Exhibitor Social, held in the exhibition area, provided an opportunity for delegates and exhibitors to meet and converse in a relaxed environment. A reception and banquet at the nearby Nauticus Maritime Center completed the social programme. This complex houses the Hampton Roads Naval Museum, the retired battleship Wisconsin, and a variety of interactive maritime and marine-science displays. The banquet was served on the outdoor patio of Nauticus, and accompanied by a steel band. As promised by the organisers, no boring speeches interrupted the evening's dining and socialising!

U.S. Hydro 2007 proved an outstanding conference from both exhibitor and delegate point of view. Hydrographers should put U.S. Hydro 2009 on their list of conferences to attend.