

## Interview: Steven A. Fangmann



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Steven A. Fangmann, P.E., is currently president and CEO of D&B Engineers and Architects. D&B provides services to many municipal clients in the water and wastewater areas. He also serves as the vice chair of the Legislative Affairs Subcommittee of the Water Environment Federation (WEF) Government Affairs Committee.

As a New York Mets fan, Steven’s baseball hobby is fairly substantial. Also, as a history nut, he has studied presidents, the American Revolution and the Civil War. Steven’s wife Lucia is the real artist – from music to artwork – and she made sure that Steven took advantage of travel by going to numerous museums throughout the country.

Their family is their greatest accomplishment as they have two highly educated and unique daughters, Ann and Meghan, who have made the travels with them. Ann, her husband Andrew and their two children, Wyatt and Liana, are a joy to Steven and Lucia. Meghan and her fiancée Michael are soon to be married and bring joy to their family every day.

### My Background in the Water Industry

*Do you have any special education or licensing that has been important in your career? If so, what are they, and how have they affected your career?*

I have a Bachelor of Civil Engineering and Master of Environmental Engineering from Manhattan College. Having the education from Manhattan College allowed me to get into environmental engineering from the start of my career. Courses that I had at Manhattan were directly related to my work for the Nassau County Department of Public Works, who operated two large wastewater treatment plants – or water resource recovery facilities (WRRFs) – and over 3,000 miles of sanitary sewers at the time that I was there. My education allowed for me to obtain the experience to go from the entry position to the deputy commissioner of Public Works in charge of all of Nassau’s wastewater facilities as well as regional water planning and hazardous waste investigations.

I also received a professional engineering (P.E.) license early on in my career after taking the engineer-in-training (EIT) exam in my senior year at Manhattan. The P.E. allowed for me to accept responsible positions in municipal government and to direct and manage large municipal projects after I left public service and started in private practice for engineering firms.

I also became a board-certified environmental engineer (BCEE) with the American Academy of Environmental Engineers and Scientists. This credential recognizes the depth of experience, education and licensure to be recognized in the field.

*What sparked your interest in the water sector?*

My interest in the water field paralleled the awareness of the environment going on in this country in the early to mid-70s. Although I was trained as a civil engineer, my electives in the environmental engineering program at Manhattan piqued my interest in the water

and wastewater fields. I saw that I could be directly involved on project teams in reviewing alternatives and providing recommendations and designs on projects that mattered.

*How has your career evolved over time?*

I worked for a public entity for 16 years, followed by work in private practice for close to 30 years. I was able to start at an entry level as a “sanitary” Engineer 1 and rise to deputy commissioner in charge of the entire operation and after that experience started as an associate in a large engineering firm and eventually became the president and CEO of D&B Engineers and Architects.

In a similar way, and on a parallel course, I started as a student member of NYWEA at Manhattan College and over time became Long Island chapter chair and eventually president of NYWEA. This involved getting on committees at the chapter level and on the state level. The number of people that I have met over the years gave me a true understanding of the dedication that everyone in our industry has toward our common goal of clean water for today and for future generations.

*How has your career in the clean water sector affected your family?*

Everything that I have accomplished would not have happened without my family. They supported me by attending all the chapter functions and later, all state and some national functions. Sometimes it was a little much, when I took side trips to wastewater plants to see some of my friends, but the support from my wife Lucia never ended.

### My Reflections on the Clean Water Act

*When did you first become aware of the Clean Water Act?*

I became aware of the Clean Water Act (CWA) when I applied for funding to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency to pay for graduate school. Basically, I reviewed the federal regulations and applied for my first grant or fellowship to obtain my master’s degree.

*How has the Clean Water Act affected your personal life?*

The CWA affected me in attending graduate school, in all of my municipal projects and in all of the grants that I applied for and obtained over the years. On a personal level the CWA in effect paralleled my career from start to finish. One of the requirements of the fellowship I obtained was to work for a municipal government for two years. The intent was to bring trained students into water and wastewater agencies to bring the CWA forward. The logic seemed to work in my case as I worked for 16 years at Nassau County. If I did not have that requirement, it would have been easy to take a job in private practice for 50% more income. The work with Nassau County was like being on the ground floor and I was able to work with the best municipal operations and maintenance staffs at the time as well as seasoned leaders in engineering and with private firms that were on the project teams. Of course, I also worked with regulatory agencies at the local, state and federal levels as well as the public from early on in my career. It was less pay, but you could not pay enough for the experience.

*What do you see as the greatest impact of the Clean Water Act on our world today?*

The CWA began a legacy of turning around pollution of our waters to a day when you can turn on a tap anywhere in the United

States and be sure that you are drinking water that will not bring on disease and you will be able in most cases to dispose of wastewater without impacting ground and surface waters. As our population increases and the systems that were built 50 and 100 years ago decay, we cannot let down our guard. There is much more to do, and the job never ends.

Industry and neighborhoods can only thrive with potable water and adequate treatment systems and the development of staff necessary to run the 24/7 facilities day in and day out.

Although we are fortunate in this country, there are numerous places in the world where drinking water and disposal facilities are inadequate at best. The pain and suffering and disease that can be prevented will take a world program, like the CWA has been in this country. Potable water and waste disposal facilities are finally being seen as a basic human right. A lot of work is necessary to bring these rights to others.

***What do you think will be the greatest challenge for the clean water sector over the next 50 years?***

The greatest challenge is to recognize the need for adequate funding of the infrastructure needed to meet the goals of safe and clean water for all. The design life of equipment for 25 years and structural facilities for 50 years is only one lifetime. If we want to have the facilities that we have now for our children and grandchildren, we must understand that our industry has worked out of sight and out of mind. While we need good roads and transportation facilities, we see their deterioration in front of us every day by just looking so to speak. The infrastructure needed to meet water and wastewater demands has recently come to light with climate change and disasters. It is well understood that without water the economy stops. You cannot live without water. Congress has recently recognized this along with state and local governments and more funding is coming to our industry. However, for too long funding has almost total-

ly been borne by local governments and when disaster comes, facilities are inadequate to meet the strain. New and enhanced facilities must be sustainable and must weather the storm of climate change and use over time. This is a tremendous challenge and will remain one far beyond the next 50 years.



**Steven Fangmann in Washington, D.C., during the WEF National Water Policy Fly-In, April 2019.**  
*Patricia Cerro-Reehil*



**Ambassador Mike Garland, Ambassador Steven Fangmann, Executive Director Patricia Cerro-Reehil, Ambassador Geoffrey Baldwin and Chapter Representative Richard Kenealy.**

