

CALIFORNIA

SPECIAL DISTRICTS

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CaIPERS CEO

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The Time to Tell Your Special District Success Story to Customers Is Now

By Angela Lowrey, Public Information Manager, Delta Diablo and Jennifer Cabral, Public Affairs Supervisor, Orange County Sanitation District

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Identified by the Little Hoover Commission as “the workhorses of public service delivery”, each day over 2,000 Special Districts are directly responsible for the economic, social and environmental success of California.

Yet many of the 40 million customers we proudly serve do not know the essential services we provide; recognize our dedicated workforce; or, understand the direct value we bring to their families, businesses and communities. The time to tell your story is now!

Orange County Sanitation District has had some outstanding success stories, including recently receiving an award for their website re-design as well as receiving the Special District Transparency certificate from Special District Leadership Foundation (*find out more at www.sdlf.org*).

And most newsworthy, Orange County Agencies set a GUINNESS WORLD RECORDS™ Title for most wastewater recycled into drinking water in 24 hours!

On February 16, 2018, The Orange County Water District (OCWD) and Orange County Sanitation District (OCS D) succeeded in the attempt to set a Guinness World Records title for the Most wastewater recycled to drinking water in 24 hours.

The Guinness World Records title was achieved by the Groundwater Replenishment System (GWRS), which is the world’s largest water purification facility of its kind. This achievement commemorates the 10th anniversary of the facility, a collaboration between the two districts.

“This is a time to celebrate and learn about this proven technology that is so vital to sustaining our communities and our natural environment,” said OCS D Board Chairman and GWRS Steering Committee Vice-Chair Greg Sebourn. “We have the technology now to produce safe drinking water that ensures long-term reliability of local supplies.”

The Guinness World Records title attempt to produce the most wastewater recycled into drinking water in 24 hours started at 3:30 p.m. on Thursday, Feb. 15. The successful completion of the Guinness World Records title attempt was announced Friday, Feb. 16, during the Winter Fest, a public event that was held at the GWRS facility. The celebration included a community toast with recycled water from the facility.

“This was an incredible attempt that impacted the local community and environment. It provided perspective on the process of making water safe for consumption,” said Philip Robertson, official GUINNESS WORLD RECORDS adjudicator. “We congratulate the efforts of Orange County Water





District and Orange County Sanitation District and welcome them into the Guinness World Records family.”

Currently, regulations limit the use of advanced purified water to replenish groundwater basins even though the GWRS facility creates water that exceeds state and federal drinking water standards. California law AB 2022, adopted in 2016, seeks

to expand the public’s awareness of water treatment advancements by allowing agencies such as OCWD to bottle highly purified recycled water to be handed out for free as an educational tool. The water is so pure, it is near-distilled in quality. The awareness effort is occurring as the state marches toward direct potable reuse of this water.

Around the world there are facilities similar to the GWRS, but the Orange County facility is considered the largest of its kind. The GWRS currently produces 100 million gallons a day of highly purified recycled water to inject into the Orange County Groundwater Basin, managed by OCWD, to increase local drinking water supplies and to prevent seawater intrusion. Work will soon be under way to expand its capacity to produce 130 million gallons a day of purified recycled

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water—enough for 1 million people. “For more than a century, California has relied on rivers like the Colorado and Sacramento for our water. Today, we demonstrated we have new rivers to utilize,” said renowned climate expert and scientist Bill Patzert, who emceed the celebration program. “It makes perfect sense to use the technology we have today to use the water we have

right in our backyard and recycle it for drinking water.”

OCSD and OCWD utilized a milestone to create a platform. The GWRS has received significant coverage from all around the world. In celebrating the 10th Anniversary, the question during the planning was, “how we will create new interest?” We had to create a purpose to reengage our public. With the success of the 10-year celebration and setting a Guinness World Records title for most wastewater recycled into drinking water in 24 hours the efforts paid off. With over 1,000 attendees at the community event and a potential reach of over 350 million readers, the GWRS was once again in the news, and being talked about in our community and amongst our policy makers. As special districts, we need to take every opportunity to tell our story, share our successes and build a relationship with our public. *For more information about OCSD visit www.ocsd.com.*

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Delta Diablo is a recognized leader supporting partnerships which promote the social, environmental and economic value wastewater resource recovery brings to the communities they serve. Community engagement has proven to be a key asset building trust with stakeholders, and this district proactively seeks opportunities to

network and share resources through targeted public/private projects which benefit their 200,000 customers.

Public Information Manager, Angela Lowrey proactively creates programs which give visibility to the challenges and opportunities in wastewater management, water resource development, and environmental stewardship. Working with local school districts to develop business-education alliances with local schools around Science, Technology, Environment and Mathematics (STEM) curriculum and activities has proven to be a worthwhile endeavor by helping raise awareness of the valuable role wastewater services plays in ensuring quality of life and also serving as a way to attract the next generation of wastewater professionals.

One example of this is when Delta Diablo arranged for internationally-recognized explorer, environmentalist, educator and film producer, Jean-Michel Cousteau, to visit their service area and give an environmental presentation to 1,200 high school students from three school districts. The engaging performance by Mr. Cousteau sharing his mission to protect our global ocean, documenting the critical connection between humanity and nature, and celebrating the ocean's vital importance to the survival of all life on our planet, directly aligned with Delta Diablo's business-education STEM outreach focus.



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“Internationally-recognized explorer, environmentalist, educator and film producer, Jean-Michel Cousteau, gives an environmental presentation to 1,200 high school students from three school districts.

Delta Diablo capitalized on this special program to involve media, school personnel, business people, elected representatives and community leaders to participate. It helped customers understand the work undertaken every day by environmental stewards. Raising sponsorship funds and securing in-kind donations, enabled Delta Diablo to offer this program at no costs to students or schools to participate.

It generated a lot of media coverage, including a one-hour documentary which was repeatedly shown over the next year on local public television which reflected in positive branding for our agency. It also contributed to excellent interagency networking and positive relationship building by inviting other public agencies, businesses and industry associations to be part of a program they could possibly have undertaken on their own.

For more information on Delta Diablo, visit www.deltadiablo.org.



Look for related content at the General Manager Leadership Summit

At the CSDA General Manager Leadership Summit, award-winning public engagement professionals representing the California Association of Public Information Officials (CAPIO) will share tools and best practice tips in 10 easy steps to help you increase the visibility of your Special District, improve transparency on the fiscal responsibility of your agency, showcase your leadership successes, and build a positive brand reputation which customers will recognize and respect on the best days, and executives can draw upon to help navigate the public spotlight during difficult times.

Angela Lowrey affirms: “No matter the size, budget or directive of your District, there are many opportunities to incorporate public information strategies to help achieve your agency’s strategic goals. Jennifer and I look forward to meeting you at this year’s CSDA

General Manager Summit where we will be sharing information, anecdotes and best practice advice which we guarantee will help showcase your successes to the customers you proudly serve every day.”

Many of California’s special district public information professionals are members of the California Association of Public Information Officials (CAPIO). While numerous communication principals are universal, government communicators face unique requirements and demands from their communities and stakeholders. CAPIO’s message is very clear: “good government needs good communicators”, and their mission is to help support public officials engaging communities through honest and transparent communication. For more information about CAPIO, visit www.capio.org.



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