



By Benjamin H. Grumbles

Celebrating current
and future efforts in
water leadership

Water Winners

Poet John Keats' epitaph, "Here lies one whose name was writ in water," reminds me of the need to shout out the names and memorialize the works of current water leaders to boost their efforts and set shining examples for others now—not decades or centuries from now.

Celebration and motivation can come in many forms. 2010 was a banner year for water-inspired books, magazines and other musings. For example: *National Geographic's* book "Written in Water" includes essays by leaders such as former governor and U.S. Environmental Protection Agency Administrator Christine Todd Whitman ("Dynamic for Change," on watershed strategies), and also *National Geographic's* March 2010 special issue, "Our Thirsty Planet"—a monumental tribute to our most precious liquid asset and the people striving to protect it.

Institutions such as museums, aquariums, schools, water treatment plants, airports and hotels also can offer venues for educating and motivating by elevating the profiles of water movers and shakers, treaters and savers. Two of my favorite examples: 1) the coastal ecosystem learning centers at 23 of the nation's aquariums through efforts of Coastal America (www.coastalamerica.gov), a collaboration of federal, state and local agencies and private entities; and 2) the 2008 dedication of the largest exhibit within the Smithsonian's National Museum of Natural History, the Sant Ocean Hall, to advance ocean literacy and promote marine stewardship.

Worthy of Recognition

Another way to celebrate leadership is through annual awards. I have been involved in several great water prize events over the years, but three stand out as particularly promising and effective (even though they have included me as a judge or helper).

The U.S. Conference of Mayors has an annual City Water Conservation Achievement Award. Three independent judges cull through scores of applications from cities and score the water conservation work under three criteria: achievement (such as documented reduction in per capita consumption), innovation and multiple benefits (such as reduced costs for infrastructure, energy savings, smaller carbon footprints and improved ecosystem health).

This year's winners, Napa, Calif., and Sandy City, Utah, beat out 54 other cities to get top honors, including a small cash prize and bragging rights among peers. And both cities have good reason to brag, demonstrating that "a gallon saved is a gallon earned and then some" (factoring in the multiple benefits flowing from improved efficiencies and ecosystems).

Napa has a three-part approach to achieving its goal of "no new water" imports for augmenting supplies: requirements for new development to offset water consumption through conservation and efficiency, incentives for fixture and facility retrofits at existing developments, and emphasis on water reuse

and recycling. Sandy City also is connecting the dots and drops, reducing its per capita consumption by 35 gal, with a 27% reduction in one year through "true cost pricing," public education and rebates for water- and energy-efficient appliances.

Since 1990, the Stockholm Water Foundation, with the assistance of the Stockholm International Water Institute (www.siwi.org) has sponsored a prestigious annual award for individuals demonstrating global leadership on water. Nine judges from around the world, with diverse talents and experiences in water, scrutinize the nominees from fields including scientific research, education and outreach, water management, local advocacy and humanitarian work. The foundation also oversees a Stockholm Junior Water Prize for youth and a Stockholm Industry Water Prize. Keep your eyes and ears open to learn more about this year's winners on World Water Day, March 22.

A Campaign to Inspire

The Clean Water America Alliance (www.cwaa.us), which keeps me employed and mostly off the streets but not out of the sewers or streams, is launching the first annual U.S. Water Prize. This won't diminish the need for or value of existing awards given by individual water sectors or industries, but it will showcase, like never before and on a very big stage, the value of water and the great contributions of America's water champions to fellow citizens and the world. It will become an annual, high-profile, first-class campaign to increase public awareness and inspire the next generation of leaders.

This year, five winners representing cities, utilities, regional collaborations and research and educational organizations will be showered with praise at a grand celebration in Washington, D.C., on May 9. The alliance will help the fabulous five tell their stories of water innovation, integration, collaboration and climate change-driven adaptation to citizens from coast to coast and around the planet. The winners are connected by their commitment to shifting the water paradigm to a more holistic, watershed-based approach, embracing the energy-water nexus, efficiency, conservation and reuse, and green for gray infrastructure.

Celebrating is hardly a substitute for concrete action, but when it is done well, the works of a few are written in stone, rather than water, for the education of many and the benefit of all, globally and locally. www

Benjamin H. Grumbles is president of the Clean Water America Alliance. Views expressed in this column may not necessarily reflect those of the Alliance or its members. Grumbles can be reached at bhgrumbles@gmail.com.

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