

Maintaining Water Reliability

Facility providing 100% local water supplies for customers set to welcome AWWA ACE15 visitors



Interview compiled by Elisabeth Lisican



Shawn Dewane was appointed to the Mesa Water District board of directors in 2005, elected in 2006, and re-elected in 2010 and 2014. He served as president in 2009 and 2010, and as first vice president in 2008, and he is again serving as president until 2016. Dewane also is chairman of CalDesal, an advocate for clean, safe and reliable drinking water for California, and president of the Orange County Water District Board of Directors. Dewane can be reached at shawnd@mesawater.org.

These days, more than ever before, water efficiency is important in California. While the state is on the edge of its seat waiting to see how much of a difference recently imposed mandatory water restrictions will make, the city of Anaheim is preparing to host one of the nation's biggest water events: the American Water Works Assn. Annual Conference and Exposition (ACE15). Here, Mesa Water District Board President Shawn Dewane gives W&WD Managing Editor Elisabeth Lisican a first look at what visitors can expect when they tour the Mesa Water Reliability Facility (MWRF).

Elisabeth Lisican: What makes the MWRF unique?

Shawn Dewane: Mesa Water's service area sits atop two groundwater basins that provide 100% local and reliable water supplies for customers through eight wells, three reservoirs and 350 miles of pipeline. Mesa Water was the first water purveyor in Orange County to treat and distribute amber-colored water in 2001, employing an ozone treatment process. Mesa Water updated the facility with a nanofiltration process in 2012 to increase its production capacity. Today, 30% of the water provided to Mesa Water's service area is produced by the MWRF.

Lisican: How was it funded?

Dewane: The \$20 million MWRF Improvements Project is being funded through a groundwater cleanup fund provided by Orange County Water District to prevent amber-colored water intrusion into the upper clear-water basin.

Lisican: What can ACE15 visitors expect when they tour this facility?

Dewane: The MWRF tour includes an overview of the water-efficient demonstration gardens, the mini redwood forest that represents the amber-colored water in the lower groundwater basin, and the nanofiltration process room.

Drought's Blame Game

Alarming reports of an increasingly dire drought this year contributed to California Gov. Jerry Brown's unprecedented, headline-grabbing mandatory urban water use restrictions, announced on April 1.

But the fact that agriculture was largely spared from the restrictions, according to a Sacramento Bee article, led to an outcry. Brown defended the exemptions, saying that agriculture accounts for most of the state's water use and that putting additional pressure on farmers would only add to the harm they already have suffered as a result of the four-year drought.

Also exempt from Brown's bill was the oil industry, sparking additional backlash and concern over just how much of a difference the urban water use crackdown will make. "Shouldn't the state be imposing its rules on the real water abusers?" one writer of an opinion piece in *The New Yorker* wrote.

But the issue at the heart of the matter, as the writer concluded, is that everyone needs to change their water use habits, and that includes industry and agriculture alike. This issue is a complex one. It will be interesting to see how California—and other drought-stricken regions—take serious charge all around in order to secure their water supplies.

Lisican: What changes or upgrades are ahead for this facility?

Dewane: The original facility was decommissioned in 2010 and updated to increase its production capacity to 1.5 times its previous capacity. In late 2012, Mesa Water commissioned the updated MWRF using a physical separation process known as nanofiltration. The award-winning MWRF Improvements Project has achieved Mesa Water's current and prior board of directors' longstanding vision of supplying 100% locally sourced, reliable water to satisfy its community's water needs.

Lisican: How does Mesa Water District integrate public education and outreach into its operations?

Dewane: Mesa Water works with local schools, the Municipal Water District of Orange County, and the Discovery Science Center to teach elementary school students about the value of water, the water cycle and how to be water efficient. Mesa Water hosts a Water Issues Study Group to help share important water information with adults through a three-part series; tour of the MWRF and one of the district's reservoirs; and an annual alumni event with a guest speaker on relevant, timely issues in water, in addition to multiple water-efficient landscape workshops.

Throughout the year, Mesa Water board and staff participate in community events to share information, distribute water conservation devices and make sure people know who provides water to their homes and businesses. Through its Winter 2014-2015 Mesa Water Saver campaign, Mesa Water distributed leak detection dye tablets and other conservation information to every residence in its service area, encouraging the efficient use of our precious water supplies. As a result of the Mesa Water Saver campaign, water use decreased 13%. **w&wd**

Elisabeth Lisican is managing editor of W&WD. Lisican can be reached at elisican@sgcmail.com or 847.391.1012.