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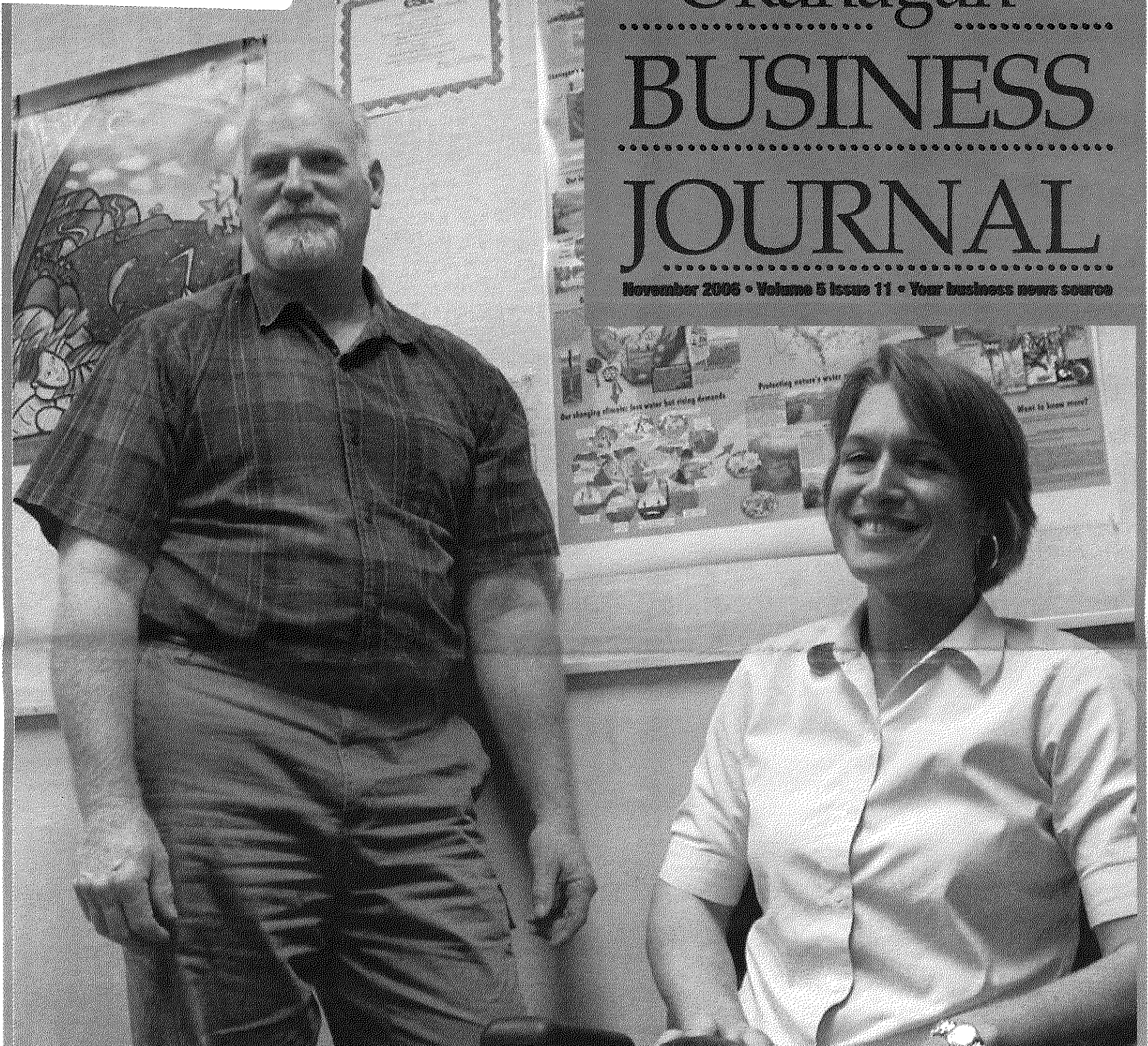
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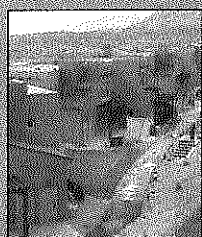
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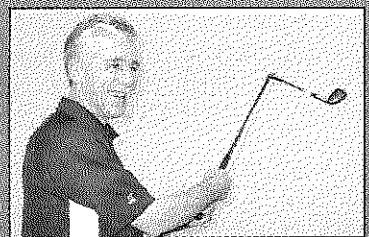
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**UP FRONT**

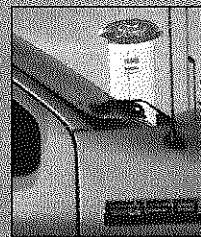
Greg Armour and Anna Warwick Sears are charged with navigating a course through stormy but dwindling waters caused by climate change, parochialism, century old water rights, a lack of proper data and lots of people. Sears says, 'Can do.' **PAGE 3**



**WILLING SPIRIT**  
 Phase 1 of Osoyoos' first 4-star resort is sold out, and Phase 2 is off to a hot start. **P. 4**



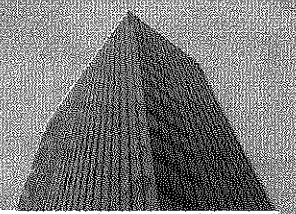
**CLUB TROUBLES**  
 Two businessmen are betting they can help with your golf swing and other curses. **P. 27**



**TRUCK TALK**  
 Globally, Ford and GM are taking it on the chin, but locally, dealers say it's different. **P. 6**

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# Uncharted Waters



DEVON BROOKS/OBJ PHOTO

The Beaver Creek falls near Winfield are part of 79 different water sheds feeding into the Okanagan basin. Precise flows for almost 80% of these sheds have never been properly measured.

“We’re not going to have a water utopia—ever.”

- Dr. Anna Warwick Sears

BY DEVON BROOKS  
OBJ EDITOR

“I don’t see on the horizon why there would be friction.” Let it never be said that Dr. Anna Warwick Sears isn’t an optimist, which may well be a prerequisite for her new job as she heads up the recently invigorated Okanagan Basin Water Board (OBWB).

Contrast Sears hope for smooth sailing with a statement made by the Canadian Water Resources Association (CWRA) in 2005 at a Kelowna conference: “To move toward sustainable water management in the Okanagan Basin requires difficult decisions now that will include reducing demand, new governance models that consider the basin as a whole, and more pro-active management.”

Ted van der Gulik works for the Resource Management Branch of the B.C. Ministry of Agriculture & Lands. He puts a blunt point on just how soon these water conflicts will transform from being academic discussion to major, and likely contentious issues. “The water resources of the Okanagan will be totally allocated in less than 15 years.”

Incidentally the CWRA predicted water resources will be allocated within 25 years, a bit longer than van der Gulik’s 15-year time span, but either time line shows why the OBWB is getting new attention.

The Board has been around since the 1970s when it was formed to deal with the spread of water milfoil and to assist in improving sewage treatment.

According to van der Gulik

it actually came out of a 1974 report on water in the Okanagan basin. There were other recommendations, which were never implemented although Sears is quick to give credit, saying the old board has been “very effective” on those two important issues; however there is now widespread recognition that the Board needs to look at a lot more.

Certainly a major motivation to take another look at water demand is the growing population. According to provincial statistics 323,000 people lived in the Okanagan as of 2004. That is

expected to increase by 50,000 over the next nine years.

But a burgeoning population is only one problem. Climate change is another. As the Board notes in its Phase 2 Prospectus, “A long term research project... indicate[s] that the [Okanagan] Basin may be particularly vulnerable to the warmer wetter winters, and longer, drier summers that are often projected for Western Canada by climate modellers.”

Van der Gulik agrees, pointing out that the total allocation of water within 15 years does not include the impacts of glob-

al warming. He says, The whole hydrology of the Okanagan is going to change in the next 30 to 50 years.”

Snow packs will be reduced or nonexistent and daytime highs in Kelowna in July will frequently hit 40 C.

The current hydrology is going to take sucker shots from some unexpected quarters as well. Sears adds, “One hydrologist says the pine beetle is the biggest driver of water supply changes since the glaciers left the valley.”

In her calm, understated way, she says, “There are poten-

tially some very big things that could happen.”

That is why the old Board has had its budget pumped up to \$3 million and new staff, including Sears, have been hired to sort out the complex, overlapping issues.

The Board’s first problem is that no one is really sure how serious the problems are.

For one thing no one knows exactly how much water flows into the Okanagan or how much is being taken out. The Okanagan gets water from 79 different water sheds, but accurate water gauge data is available on only 16 of them.

Those 16 are the biggest sheds, but it still leaves a lot of guess work, which is why, Sears says, “It’s hard to say if we’re in a water deficit right now. Basic research is a priority.”

Phase 1 of the OBWB’s mandate, which was completed in 2005, was to figure out what needed to be studied and what needed to be done to fill in the blanks.

Phase 2, now underway, is about “exploring these new functions.”

Determining accurate numbers for inflow is only one of four parts. Other parts include modeling how population, climate change, land use changes and other factors will affect both supply and demand.

No matter how those numbers come out the two big issues will be how to manage demand and how to allocate it if and

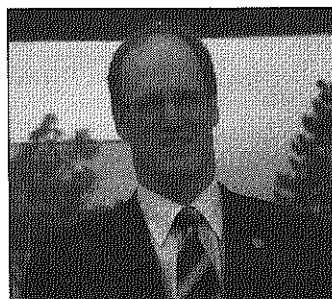
SEE DEMAND MANAGEMENT P.5

## INSIDE THE OBJ

- ♦ Opinion . . . . . P.12
- ♦ South . . . . . P.9
- ♦ North . . . . . P.17
- ♦ Central . . . . . P.19
- ♦ List . . . . . P.23
- ♦ Paperwork . . . . . P.24

## CAN YOU SPARE 2 BUCKS?

The B.C. Federation of Labour says it is time to increase the minimum wage, but no one in business seems to agree. Are we creating the working poor? ...P. 11



## BUSINESS PROFILE

With the separation from UBC-O behind it, you’d be forgiven if you thought Okanagan College’s future would be more relaxed, but Jim Hamilton says the winds of change are a’blowin’ hard and fast...P. 26

◆ AN ARID FUTURE

DEMAND MANAGEMENT FROM P 3

when there are shortages, but Sears says the changes won't be forced on anyone by the OBWB because that's not their mandate. "It is not a strong arm entity."

Even if the Board doesn't, or can't, force decisions on users or communities, allocation choices will have to be made by someone because it is unlikely that they will be done voluntarily if residents and business have to make sacrifices.

Sears believes foresight provides the best chance to reduce or eliminate friction. "If you anticipate there could be an intense crisis in the future you want to start the conversation now and keep negotiations and contacts going."

She has a point though - dealing with the hypothetical drought of 2013 when the Dept. of Fisheries and Oceans demands that water be allocated to a stream instead of going to agriculture will be done much more sensibly if guidelines are in place years before the crises develop.

Sears only touches on

the issue, but clearly water rights set a century ago are going to need a shake up. She says, "There is a big context here and the context is the province issuing water licenses. Licenses are given in perpetuity - first in time is first in right. Legally if there was a shortage, the older rights have the legal right. Mostly agricultural users have the oldest rights."

When the entire Okanagan supported 10,000 people it wasn't much of a problem, even in drought years, but 70% of water goes to agriculture and another 15% goes to "turf irrigation". That's watering lawns in an arid, semi-desert climate.

When water flows get to the point where it may be agriculture or residential supplies or industrial users or stream flows for fish, politicians are going to be dragged in to the fights.

Since 70% of water use in the valley is for agriculture, the question is going to be does it make political or economic sense, even in the face of established legal rights, to shut down industries that support thousands to keep fruits growing on an orchard that supports ten? Such

disputes could be ugly.

What they won't be is protracted because in the face of fish kills or forest fires or economic calamity politicians will be forced to act quickly.

Too quickly perhaps, especially if proper information is not available.

These kind of hasty or politically expedient decisions are the kinds of things Sears and the OBWB want to avoid: first by providing sound data for decisions; second by engaging decision makers on the issues in advance; third with advice on various policy issues; fourth by letting the public know what is happening; and lastly, by providing alternatives that can avoid, or at least reduce the severity of future water crises.

Gathering information is already underway under the guidance of Sears and Armour, a steering committee, a working group and a water stewardship council consisting of experts throughout the valley who are "studying the issues and their interconnections."

Specific policy advice is still a way off but Sears already knows the "two main things are more water storage and conserva-

tion - you need buffers."

One project the OBWB funded this year was the replacement of water line valves for farms in the Osoyoos area. The project involved a \$23,000 grant from the OBWB.

That project, overseen by Bill Stewart of Osoyoos, shows how new management interweaves technology and shaking up the status quo.

Stewart says, "[The valves] were so old that some farmers were getting almost four times what they were allowed."

New valves have been installed, but improved water management can have unforeseen costs. The farmers who were receiving excessive amounts of water are faced with irrigating the same amount of land with much less water than they have been receiving in recent years.

Stewart says they had to install more efficient irrigation systems, but the farmer's costs are not covered by the OBWB.

Just how many other unpleasant surprises are going to come down the road are unknown, but public buy-in will be important.

That probably explains a \$20,000 grant

from the OBWB for an exhibit to run at Kelowna's eco-centre from April to August of next year on water issues.

Or in the Grandview Waterworks District of Spallumcheen, where the Board contributed \$16,400 toward a water metering program. Metering raises hackles because measurement is arguably the first step toward charging by the litre, which is not seen as a positive development by Canadians used to thinking of water as free.

Free is an idea valley residents are going to have

to put into the dumpster of history. As the Board said with a \$27,000 grant to Peachland, "Not only does water metering provide clear and useful information for water providers and water users, but water metering can provide a strong incentive for water conservation. In Peachland, water meters are expected to reduce water consumption by 20%."

Whatever solutions are proposed Sears is undoubtedly correct when she concludes, "We're not going to have a water utopia ever."



PHOTO CONTRIBUTED

This \$9.2 million expansion of the Westside wastewater treatment plant will allow a facility designed in 1988 to handle 2,800 sewer connections to handle wastewater from 14,000 buildings.

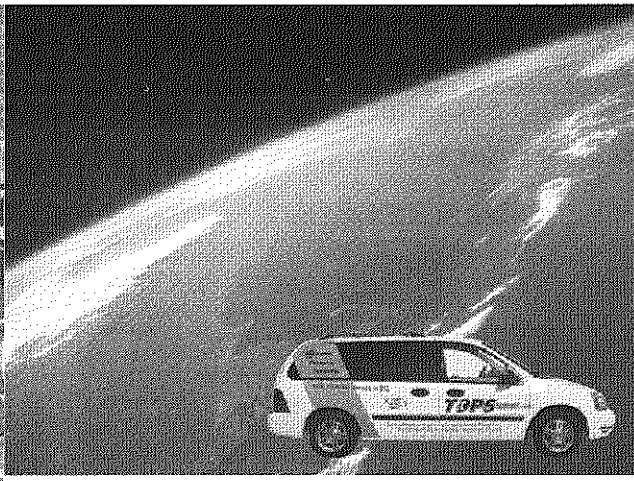
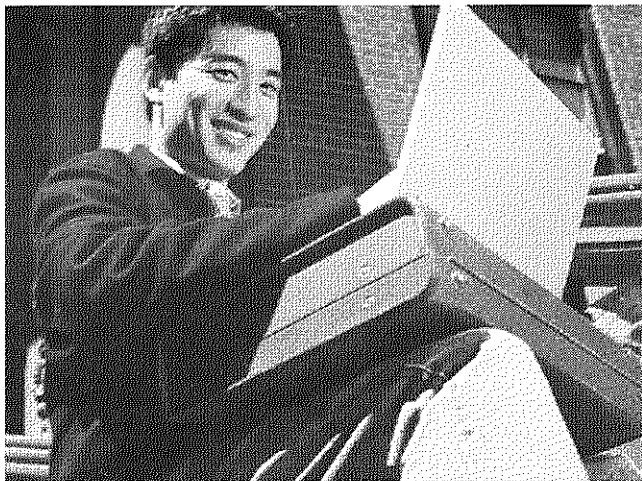
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