

## LOCAL

### Valley could lead, learn about water all at once

By J.P. SQUIRE

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An international expert on water is keeping a close eye on the Okanagan Valley.

Robert Sandford, Canadian chairman of the UN's Water for Life partnership, was the guest speaker at a UBC Okanagan distinguished speaker series in Penticton on Monday night and a panelist at a Kelowna forum Monday morning.

"I've been here a number of other times before and I've been watching the Okanagan with real interest, of course, because it is one of the places in Canada where water is a serious issue," he said Monday.

Sandford was not the least surprised at the level of expertise gathered for the panel on World Water Day.

"A lot of people in Canada look at this place and hold that you are working on things that are going to matter to everybody in the future, because you are addressing some of these water scarcity issues first."

Even though the Okanagan is still determining what water scarcity will mean with its growing population, Valley authorities can – and should – learn what others around the world have done, he said.

Because of Internet and email, it has never been easier to discover potential solutions and to communicate with those who have learned from similar experiences, he said.

"There are a lot of people who know a lot about this.

"And there have been lots of policy choices made that we can observe and measure in terms of their success and see whether they can be applied in local situations like this," he said.

Ironically, those who manage water sometimes do too good of a job, Sandford said.

"They manage to do really important things, significant engineering is developed with careful management," he said.

"And what that does is give people tremendous confidence in the water resources they have so it is out of mind.

"They take it for granted."

But sooner or later in a dry climate like the Okanagan, the public will have to practise water conservation "in a serious way to support the technical efforts that allow you to have the water quality and resources that you possess."

It's important to recognize there is more turbulence with warmer temperatures so there will likely be more droughts as well as flooding, he added.

"We have seen classic examples in Spain and Australia of enormously powerful floods in one part of the basin, and persistent and deep droughts in the other part of the same basin," he said.

"That's a very interesting development and I wouldn't be surprised if you begin to see more of that in the future. That has also occurred here in the past."

Water for Life is a national partnership to advance long-term water quality and availability issues in response to climate change in this country and abroad.