NEWS

SWURT a vital part of water management

By Dorothy Brotherton
Westside Weekly

No, SWURT is not a new cartoon character, it's the Streamlined Water Use Reporting Tool, introduced in West Kelowna recently by the Okanagan Basin Water Board.

Mayor Doug Findlater called it an "impressive tool," and Anna Warwick Sears of the water board said it is critical for managing the Okanagan's water supplies and preparing for expected shortages.

It's an online computer software program designed for large volume water users to make it easy to report water use monthly.

"It's a giant step forward in the Okanagan, a first for B.C.," said Sears, explaining the pilot project here will roll out across the province if all goes well.

Water utility personnel will plug in information and the program will standardize the data, organize the information and spit it back in a useable format to both water utilities and government departments.

It is expected to save a whole lot of paperwork and time spent by water staff, who currently send paper-and-pencil reports to a variety of agencies.

Basically, it means we can have an ongoing record of how much water we are using.

Currently, the average Okanagan resident uses two times more water than the average Canadian, and yet the Okanagan has the least amount of water available per person in Canada, said Sears.

She recalled seeing a movie from 1972-73 about Okanagan water use, which asked hard questions of how to protect the water for our children.

"We could ask, how come we didn't fix it? But this is generational work.

"A major effort was undertaken (by an earlier generation) to get sewage out of the lake. Now it's about water supply," she added.

The data collected by SWURT, Sears noted, is important for infrastructure planning, long-term planning of communities, title and rights issues with first nations and other issues.

SWURT is geared to the Okanagan's 25 major water utilities, but is intended to bring together all those who extract large amounts of ground water.

"This is a fundamental change in how we manage water. We're looking for grants to expand it.

"It's not just about preparing for water shortages, but about having a much richer source of water management. It's about preserving this beautiful valley that we share," said Sears.

KIRSTIN LESOSKY/Westside Weekly

LIFE'S A BEACH

The George Court Beach Access was the place to be on a snowy day as residents gathered for a bonfire and some chili served up in bread bowls. Hosted by the Westside Resident's and Business Association, the event was well attended as residents enjoyed the tucked away-beach access, now under debate for a potential trade.

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SWURT

Findlater said West Kelowna staff welcomes the tool. He spoke proudly of steps in water protection being taken by the new municipality.

He explained West Kelowna has integrated two well-run large irrigation districts and now has five water utilities.

The official community plan will reflect our water values, Findlater added. He enumerated other strides, such as a water master plan and a stormwater management plan underway.

"Coun. Carol Zanon is a champion of xeriscaping and conservation," said Findlater.

He sits on the regional district's committee on wastewater management and noted the Westside plant is going to flow metering.

"The charge will be based on flow, not just number of residences, so it's an added reason to reduce consumption – it will reduce your taxes."

Bruce Wilson of Spot Solutions called SWURT a "one-stop data shop," and noted that "you can't manage what you can't measure."

He pictured trying to manage New York City traffic by driving a 1957 Chev through the streets, using a map, a phone booth and rolling down the window to ask directions, compared with the advantages of an eye-in-the-sky helicopter equipped with the latest technology.

That's an analogy of the old and new water data collection systems, he said.

Darren Schlamp of the Glenmore Ellison Irrigation District praised the new tool, but said other tools are needed.

"I look forward to more announcements of filling other gaps on our water knowledge," said Schlamp.

SWURT was developed with input from more than 25 Okanagan water utilities, government departments and ministries, and contractor, Spot Solutions.

Cost was $249,000, provided by the Building Canada Fund, Environment Canada and OBWB.

KIRSTIN LESOSKY/Westside Weekly

With Tango music playing and snow falling, Westside lawyer Paul Hergott did a cold practise run of his ballroom dance moves, straight into Okanagan Lake on Sunday. Hergott will be performing with his wife, Terri, to raise money for the hospice society.

Takes two to tango

By Michelle Coin
Westside Weekly

West Kelowna lawyer Paul Hergott and his wife, Terri, will be participating in Swinging with the Stars, an annual fundraiser for the Central Okanagan Hospice Society.

The pair will be performing the Argentine Tango March 4 at the Coast Capri Hotel.

Although the Swinging with the Stars event is sold out, the community has the chance to check out Paul and Terri as they debut their tango during the Swinging with the Stars Preview Event Fundraising Evening Feb. 25 from 6 to 11 p.m. at Shannon Lake Golf Course.
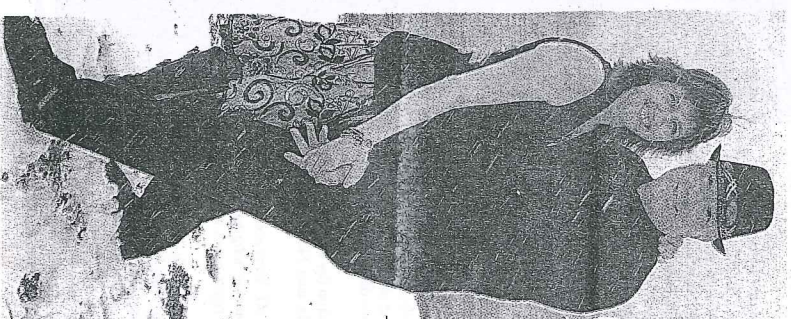
Tickets cost $20 each and include a burger dinner and beverage with a vegetarian option available, silent auction, 50/50 draw and music by Flyin' Hawaiian Entertainment with $10 of each ticket going toward Paul's fundraising campaign.

Paul is taking on a series of antics when fundraising milestones are reached which has already resulted in him taking the plunge into Okanagan Lake.

If the fundraising campaign reaches $5,000, Paul will be waxing one of his legs. If he raises $10,000, watch for him running down the street in a hotdog suit.

Tickets for the Preview Event are available at Hergott Law at 250-769-5802 and Rose Valley Deli Mart.

For more information or to donate, go online to hlaw.ca/dance, call 250-769-5802 or e-mail info@hlaw.ca.