RDOS Wins Canada Wide ‘Water’s Next’ Award for Innovation and Customer Service

Water Canada, Water’s Next is the only nation-wide, peer nominated award program of its kind. And, it appears the RDOS for its innovative programming, water conservation outreach, and customer service caught the award committee’s attention in the ‘Government – People’ category. The RDOS was pleased to be informed that Zoe Kirk, RDOS Public Works Projects Coordinator was one of 60 nominations, with winners announced at the Canada Water Summit in Toronto late June.

The RDOS conducts a variety of water stewardship projects and workshops, many times with partnerships and grants from funders such as the RBC Blue Water Project Grant and the Okanagan Basin Water Board. But, it was an in-house program that might have tipped the scales for this prestigious award.

“The West Bench Homeowner Leak Detection Program, identifying and assisting homeowners to fix leaks on their side of the water meter before volume based pricing was implemented, is very innovative” according to Water’s Next.

“I am humbled, and quite frankly, didn’t really believe it at first” says Kirk, “I am honored to be the one named on the award, but these programs and outreach initiatives would not be possible without the support of the RDOS Board, funders and dedicated fellow workers in the Public Works and Engineering Department.”

Recent floods and now drought conditions means that Kirk will not be idle anytime soon. Drought and flood workshops and debriefings, acting as liaison with the BC Climate Adaptation for Agriculture and the Okanagan Basin Water Board’s Make Water Work Campaign, continuing and broadening the leak detection program and a riparian ‘cottonwood’ restoration collaboration project with local First Nations are just a few items on the ‘to do’ list for the remainder of 2017.

For more details and videos on water conservation and information visit: http://www.rdos.bc.ca/departments/public-works/water-systems/water-conservation/water-talk/
Or http://www.rdos.bc.ca/departments/public-works/water-systems/water-conservation/

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Karla Kozakevich, Chair
Regional District of Okanagan-Similkameen
Government:

Zoe Kirk, Regional District of Okanagan-Similkameen

The word passion comes up a lot when people talk about Zoe Kirk. Kirk conducts water conservation outreach events for the Regional District of Okanagan-Similkameen (RDOS), and by any measure, she does it extremely well. Tackled with finding resourceful and innovative ways to raise awareness of water protection, conservation, and wise water use among all categories of water users, Kirk has managed to leverage a modest budget into significant community engagement. She has led community members through countless workshops, has executed a wide variety of waterwise and water protection campaigns, and spread the water conservation message at local and regional events.

Kirk admits that there are challenges promoting water conservation in one of the driest parts of Canada, where the population is small and somewhat transient. “Visitors are not always mindful of conservation,” said Kirk, “and we don’t have a big tax base for campaigns.” She has, however, managed to obtain substantial grant funding to stretch her department budget and implement projects.

Central to Kirk’s success is that she absolutely radiates enthusiasm. “Zoe communicates very effectively with the staff, politicians, and the public in a dynamic and enthusiastic style, which pulls you in and keeps your attention,” said Lisa Bloomfield, engineering supervisor at RDOS and one of Kirk’s colleagues. “Her passion for sharing what she has learned and developed is poured into every workshop or event she is present at or hosting. Her down-to-earth and helpful attitude makes her very successful when working with a diverse audience.”

Kirk is most proud of her involvement in the West Ranch Leak Detection Program, citing measurable results of saving over 400 litres of water per hour. Kirk was involved in every facet of the program, from identifying leaks in the system and holding workshops to designing and distributing a leak detection package for high-consumption residential water users. Leaks were identified before metering went into effect, and residents appreciated that the program was initiated before they became responsible for paying for water consumption under a new rate structure.

Kirk credits her passion for environmental action to a variety of influences, including David Suzuki and Anna Warwick Sears, the executive director of the Okanagan Basin Water Board. Kirk also mentioned Jason McLennan, “one of the world’s most influential individuals in the field of architecture and the green building movement.” But the best advice Kirk ever received? “My Dad always told me not to let anyone tell me something can’t be done.” — Maggie Roland

http://watercanada.net/archives/  July/Aug 2017 issue