



The National Groundwater Association presented its 2019 Groundwater Awareness Award to the San Gabriel Basin Water Quality Authority in recognition of its outreach and educational program. From left with the award: Dr. Richard Shope of the World Space Foundation; WQA Chairman Jorge Marquez; WQA Executive Director Ken Manning; and WQA Project Resource Manager Dan Colby. The award honored Shope's EcoVoices curriculum along with the WQA's efforts to inform the public about the importance of clean groundwater.



Above, industry and community members applaud as the Groundwater Awareness Award is presented to the WQA. Above right, NGWA Awards Committee Chairman David Lipson, left, presents the award to WQA Executive Director Ken Manning, center, and EcoVoices curriculum creator Dr. Richard Shope, right. Below right, Shope talks about the educational program with WQA Chairman Jorge Marquez, center, and Manning. The EcoVoices program introduces the science of the water cycle and conservation through theatrical performances and hands-on activities to area K-12 students.



Water Quality Authority Receives National Recognition

Groundwater Awareness Award Given for Eco-Voices Program and Other Outreach Efforts

By Elizabeth Smilor
Special Sections Writer



The National Groundwater Association (NGWA) presented an Outstanding Groundwater Project Award in Groundwater Awareness to the San Gabriel Basin Water Quality Authority (WQA) in recognition of its public outreach and educational programs.

The WQA was one of three applicants for the 2019 awareness award and the sole recipient. NGWA gave out 16 awards in various categories. The award recognizes the WQA-sponsored Eco-Voices program, which has taught 3,000 students annually for the past three years about the importance of clean, local water. The award also was given to WQA for its public outreach, which includes informative articles published in their constituent area.

"The Awards Committee was particularly impressed with the San Gabriel Basin Water Quality Authority's creative approach to implementing a dynamic water quality education curriculum that has reached thousands

of children and brought awareness to the public of water quantity and quality issues in the San Gabriel Valley of California," said NGWA Awards Committee Chair David Lipson. "Effectively communicating complex groundwater concepts and educating non-technical audiences is perhaps the greatest challenge faced by the groundwater profession, and WQA's project is an outstanding example of success in promoting groundwater awareness. We can't wait to see the "Dr. Hydrogeo" and Dr. von Vroom" skit."

NGWA is a community of groundwater professionals working together to advance groundwater knowledge and the success of its members through education and outreach; advocacy; cooperation and information exchange; and enhancement of professional practices.

The WQA has been charged with overseeing the groundwater cleanup of the San Gabriel Groundwater Basin since its inception in 1993. WQA's endorsed projects have been responsible for treating approximately 1.6 million acre-feet of groundwater

and removing more than 177 thousand pounds of contaminants from the Basin.

"The Water Quality Authority was established to clean up groundwater throughout the San Gabriel Valley and educate the people of the valley about groundwater contamination and the progress being made," said WQA Director Ken Manning. "The Eco-Voices program is a way for us to educate young people in a way that will have a lasting impact."

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David Lipson
NGWA Awards Committee
Chair

Through theatrical performances and hands-on science expeditions, EcoVoices programs have reached thousands of K-12 students in underserved communities within WQA's service area. These students gather throughout the year in

classrooms and parks to become EcoRangers. They observe ecosystems and keep scientific journals. They laugh as characters such as "Dr. Hydrogeo" and "Dr. von Vroom" explain in a lively skit how chemicals have seeped into our drinking water supply and what is being done to remediate the problem.

The EcoVoices curriculum, designed and implemented by Dr. Richard Shope of the World Space Foundation, focuses on the water cycle, the local watershed, water quality, the role of water agencies, and water conservation. As EcoRangers, K-12 students develop an awareness of their responsibility to sustain environmental literacy as a lifelong learning adventure.

"Water quality issues weigh on the minds of even young children," said Shope. "A third-grade girl with a concerned look on her face, asked me, 'will there be enough clean water for us when we grow up?' I assured her that water quality professionals are working on this 24/7, to make sure we will always have enough for everyone, and that being an EcoRanger means learning and understanding how to become a good decision-maker about how we use water."

To ensure student participation, EcoVoices engages in outreach to informal educators, teachers, and school districts within 25 cities overlaying the Basin to inform them of the expedition program.

Overall, the EcoVoices Expeditions program has been a tremendously successful and creative avenue for the San Gabriel Basin Water Quality Authority to spread groundwater knowledge and awareness throughout its service area, Manning said. This year-round program is creating the next generation of environmental stewards and water-quality scientists

while spreading the word about our groundwater supply to all those around them in the community.

"We are so pleased to have such an interactive and innovative program being offered in our communities," said Valerie Munoz, WQA Board Member and Mayor of La Puente. "The partnership between the WQA and Dr. Shope has allowed our students an opportunity to get a hands-on learning experience that will lead them into science and technology as a career. That is exciting." ■



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