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Armstrong Mayor Chris Pieper is given a 'chicken wing' congratulations nod from Okanagan Basin Water Board chair Sue McKortoff for his community being declared the 2020 Make Water Work Community Champion. (Barry Gerding - Black Press Media)

Armstrong mayor gives Spallumcheen kudos for tough water competition

City of Armstrong was declared the 2020 Make Water Work Community Champion once again

BARRY GERDING Oct. 1, 2020 6:00 p.m. / LOCAL NEWS / NEWS



The cheese treats were back as the City of Armstrong was declared the 2020 Make Water Work Community Champion for the fourth time since 2015.

Mayor Chris Pieper was on hand at the Okanagan Basin Water Board 50th anniversary event in Kelowna to accept the award, and as in past years hand out cheese delicacies to the other mayors in attendance.

Armstrong had previously won the contest, intended to inspire pledges of residential water conservation from community residents across the valley, in 2015, 2017 and 2018.

Pieper said his community takes considerable pride as enthusiastic participants in the contest, giving a particular shoutout to the neighbouring community of Spallumcheen as a source of competitive inspiration.

Both communities were neck-in-neck throughout the summer to see who would finish first.

"It was mostly friendly, but not so friendly," Pieper joked in accepting the community champion certificate.

"We were encouraged by our (Spallumcheen) neighbours to just give 'er."

Pieper credited the local media for spreading the word about the contest across Armstrong, and for local service and community groups offering their support.

"We had real buy-in from staff and council, Pieper said. We went to our various clubs – Lions, curling, etc. – and sent members emails and went hard. Half the people we were harassing were from Spallumcheen, so it increased both of our numbers," he laughed.

Corinne Jackson, Okanagan Basin Water Board (OBWB) communication director, said in all, 677 people pledged to conserve outdoor use of water – a 28 per cent increase over 2019.

But it's not just about the pledges, she added. The Make Water Work website had almost 12,000 visits in the last few months, more than 8,700 were first-time visitors.

"It's been a strange year," said Jackson. "Due to COVID-19, we had no public launch of the campaign.

"Normally we would have our local government and utility partners on hand. In the past, we've had school children, garden centres and other business partners, and the public attend.

"Instead, we invited Okanagan mayors to submit videos from their own yards, explaining what they were doing to conserve, and then we released a video compilation. And it turned out great."

OBWB chair Sue McKortoff, the mayor of Osoyoos, said water conservation is an important issue in the Okanagan.

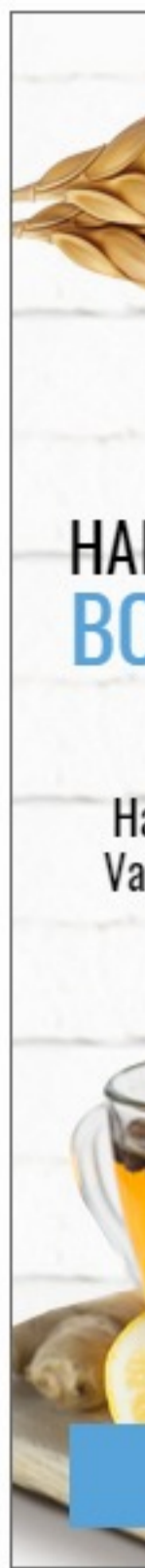
Despite a wet July, she acknowledged that portions of the south Okanagan's Vaseux Creek and Shuttleworth Creek have gone dry.

According to Okanagan Nation Alliance, two female Chinook salmon made it up Vaseux Creek before the creek's lower section dried up in early August.

No male was found and it's believed the two likely released their eggs due to stress.

"We do live in a water-stressed region," McKortoff said.

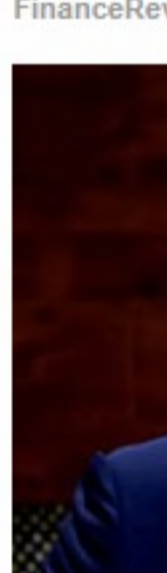
"And this year, we still need to ensure there is enough water for late harvest farm crops, salmon coming back to our streams to spawn, and potentially firefighting. We all have to do what we can.



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