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Armstrong incumbent mayor Chris Pieper (left) receives congratulation from fellow heads of municipal governments Christine Fraser (Spallumcheen, from left), James Baker (Lake Country), Sue McKortoff (Osoyoos), Victor Cumming (Vernon) and Cindy Fortin (Peachland) after capturing the Make Water Work Champion title for the fifth time since 2015. (Contributed)

Armstrong crowned water champion for fifth time

City wins OBWB's Make Water Work campaign; fifth victory since 2015

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Incoming Armstrong council may want to consider adding a title to the city's entrance.

"Welcome to Armstrong – Make Water Work five-time champion."

Make Water Work is led by the Okanagan Basin Water Board's Okanagan WaterWise program, delivered in partnership with local government and water utilities throughout the Okanagan.

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Conservation efforts were recognized the week of Sept. 12 with the awarding of the "Make Water Work Community Champion" title to the City of Armstrong for collecting the most pledges per capita to conserve water.

Outgoing Armstrong incumbent Mayor Chris Pieper is proud of his community's continued commitment to water conservation.

"Winning is the prize, but awareness and actual conservation is the biggest prize," said Pieper.

This is Armstrong's fifth champion title, having also won it in 2015, 2017, 2018 and 2020.

Pieper joined with other Okanagan mayors this spring and posted a video on social media, pledging to Make Water Work, but then council and staff took it further.

The city discussed water conservation at each council meeting through the summer. Staff posted Make Water Work information on the homepage of the city's website. There were newspaper articles, and council and staff actively promoted the campaign.

Offering a few words of advice to other communities wishing to win the championship title, Pieper said, "Involve your community, involve your volunteers – service clubs, garden clubs. You need to involve the community. You can't do it yourself."

Make Water Work also awarded two \$500 WaterWise yard upgrades to Randy Goncalves of Kelowna and Don Brain of Osoyoos.

"We want to thank local residents who did their part to reduce water use this summer," said OBWB communications director Corinne Jackson, who manages the OkWaterWise program and its Make Water Work campaign.

"Thankfully, this year's cool wet spring helped Okanagan Lake rebound from last year's significant drought. That said, record-breaking temperatures in late-July and August, made gardening difficult for some. Those who have planted for the local climate fared much better. The goal of the Make Water Work initiative is to help residents create beautiful yards that are better for water, pollinators, our community, and our climate."

As for what drew Kelowna's Goncalves to pledge, he noted "I think climate change and water conservation are really important issues. We've been doing things as a family to make a difference. We cycle, and try to reduce our energy use."

More recently, Goncalves has been turning his attention to the yard, trying to add more climate-appropriate plants.

Brain, who worked several years for a Lower Mainland parks department as a horticulturalist, also understands the importance of water conservation. Moving up to the Okanagan a few years back, he has xeriscaped the front yard and added a drip line to water only when and where needed.

"I'm excited! I don't win things," said Brain, adding that he started to re-do an area in the back yard that could benefit from a WaterWise upgrade. "I know we have to conserve water."

Although this year's Make Water Work campaign ends Oct. 15, Jackson encourages residents to follow local watering restrictions to help ensure enough water for fall crops and for fish returning to spawn in local creeks.

Residents can find water restrictions for their neighbourhood, and tips to make water work best in their yard, at <https://www.MakeWaterWork.ca/>.

There are a number of Okanagan garden centre and irrigation businesses that have partnered with the Make Water Work campaign to help residents WaterWise their yards: Blue Mountain Nursery in Armstrong; Nicholas Alexander Landscaping, and Swan Lake Market and Garden in Vernon; Ace Hardware in Lake Country; Better Earth Gardens and ProSource Irrigation in Kelowna; GardenWorks in Penticton; Sagebrush Nursery in Oliver; and Sandhu Greenhouses in Osoyoos.