



Iron County Water Stewards

Recognizing Joe Melling (1939-2018)

When the Central Iron County Water Conservancy District was formed in 1997, Cedar City Manager Joe Melling was one of the original board members, and even after his retirement in 2002, he continued working to improve the valley's water situation. He was serving on the board again at the time of his death in 2018.

Melling understood the importance of water his entire life, growing up in an agricultural family in Cedar City. His wife, Sally, said his father had a stroke when he was young and he was responsible for helping his uncles change the water. They

would redirect it to their farm to water their crops during their allotted time, and he had to go down each aisle and build dirt berms on each row that had received enough water.

After high school, a job with the Utah Water Rights Department included the responsibility of adjudicating water rights in the Cedar, Beaver and Jordan River valleys. Because water can make emotions run high, this job was sometimes very dangerous. During this time, he took night classes at Southern Utah State College (now Southern Utah University), and after 11 years of hard work he graduated with a geology degree.

Melling was quickly hired as Arizona's Director of Natural Resources and he spent four years in that position. His jurisdiction over all the state's water rights helped prepare him for the influence he would have on Cedar Valley's water.

He moved his family back to Cedar City to experience farm and ranch life, and began a job with the Five County Association of Governments where he helped prepare a water quality plan for the region. He was then hired as the Cedar City manager, a position he kept until retirement in 2002. The city budget had a significant deficit when he was hired, but he managed to bring it back into a positive budget and helped find funding for many projects, including the Coal Creek Parkway and Trail System and the Regional Waste Water Treatment Facility.

After Melling's retirement, he served an LDS Mission with his wife and then spent four years as the Parowan City Manager.

Kelly Crane, CICWCD Engineer, said during this period he remembers Melling pulling him aside in the Parowan Library and showing him a book that included a very important Iron County court case. In the case, a judge disregarded the issue of the parasite giardia being present in surface water since he couldn't see the small organisms with his own eyes, and the case law then kept source protection rules away for decades until federal regulations began protecting local drinking water supplies.

Crane said he was very impressed with Melling’s knowledge of the past and his dedication to further the CICWCD’s understanding of the basin. Melling was instrumental in completing the Hydrology and Simulation of Ground-Water Flow in Cedar Valley, Iron County, Utah, an important U.S. Geological Survey publication that was prepared in partnership with the CICWCD, state departments, Cedar City and Enoch.

“Joe Melling truly served with great knowledge and understanding of water and really devoted most of his life to improving water quality and supply for the Cedar Valley,” Crane said.

The purpose of the Iron County Water Stewards program is to recognize community members for contributing to the effort to optimize every drop of water in Iron County. The Central Iron County Water Conservancy District (CICWCD) is actively engaged in education, conservation, reuse and import projects to meet the growing demands on local water supply. For every effort you make to conserve, we consider you a water steward, too.



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