

# Iron County Water Stewards

## *Recognizing Brandon Wiggins*



Iron County native Dr. Brandon Wiggins has received international acclaim for his research about water in space. He is also keeping a close eye on water on Earth, specifically southern Utah, in helping to educate residents about drought and other local water issues.

Wiggins has recently been featured in a video series produced to help educate the community at large, which is housed on the Central Iron County Water Conservancy District's YouTube page and now circulating social media and Iron County schools. He has also worked with the District for several years helping to entertain and educate elementary students at the annual springtime Fourth/Fifth Grade Water Fair.

Paul Monroe, District General Manager, said Wiggins' demonstrations have added a fun aspect to the fair and left the kids feeling excited about water.

"His experiments are always a really memorable part of the Water Fair and we've been grateful to have him help us reach the students," Monroe said.

After the fair was cancelled last year because of Covid-19 restrictions, and due to curriculum changes, the District changed it to the Fifth Grade Water Fair this year. Instead of a large gathering, they dropped Water Fair kits off to the teachers and students will have a chance to learn the same material in their individual classrooms. Wiggins helped out by starring in a video for the students.

While his professional focus is on a much broader picture of water, what happens here matters to him too.

"On an individual basis we are concerned about water because we would like to live here," he said.

Wiggins grew up in New Harmony and has lived there and in Cedar City for most of his life. He believes growing up in a desert area may have contributed to his fascination with water. He said he has been happy to be able to contribute to and support the District's mission to provide a stable and lasting supply of water.

"Life, for us, depends on water," he said.

He said water is tied to life, on earth and in the universe. When he learned that as much as half of the solar system's water may be older than the sun itself, he was fascinated and wanted to continue research in that area.



He currently teaches as an assistant professor of physics at SUU, and is a consulting scientist for the Los Alamos National Laboratory's Center for Theoretical Astrophysics. He runs large supercomputing simulations of the universe to "basically set up scenarios" to try to discover how water first came into the universe, he said.

In 2018 he earned second place for Best Scientific Visualization at an international competition hosted by the Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers. The project was called "The First Water in the Universe," and he was the principal investigator in the project that brought together scientists from SUU, the University of Texas at Austin, and the Los Alamos National Laboratory.

Wiggins is an extremely popular professor at SUU, well-loved by students for his over-the-top demonstrations and a teaching style that reaches students from all backgrounds. He began teaching in 2016, and he received the university's Outstanding Educator Award in 2017.



Wiggins has a Ph.D. in physics and astronomy from Brigham Young University, and a bachelor's degree in pure mathematics from SUU. He has written his own physics textbook and rewritten the university's physics laboratory manuals, performed more than 30 chemistry shows for local schools and the community, done demonstrations live with the Orchestra of Southern Utah, and even composed his own music.

SUU Physical Science Department Chair Mackay Steffensen said Wiggins is an educator with an impressive teaching record, and the

university and community are better for his contributions.

"It would be impossible for me to adequately summarize Brandon's service and outreach efforts ... Brandon is an asset to the Department, College, University, and the community," Steffensen said. "We can count ourselves lucky to have someone of his caliber within our ranks."

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*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. To Get to Know Your H2O, visit <https://cicwcd.org/>.*

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