



Iron County Water Stewards

Recognizing Dane Leavitt

In the 1990s, a group of Iron County leaders and residents saw a need for a water conservancy district that would look out for the interests of the valley as a whole. Two of those people approached Dane Leavitt, and he and a committee began a six-year process to make the Central Iron County Water Conservancy District a reality.

“That has been my main public contribution to water rights issues,” he said, adding that the District has met his expectations, and has its most important work yet to come.

Leavitt said representatives from the Parowan and Brian Head areas and the Escalante

Valley (the Newcastle and Enterprise area) were not interested in participating, so the District was formed to represent Cedar City, Enoch, Kanarrville, and the unincorporated county areas surrounding them, and it was named accordingly. The District’s boundaries are served by the Cedar Valley Aquifer, and the other two areas utilize separate underground water supplies.

Roy “Pug” Urie and Joe Melling were the men who first approached Leavitt, and Dr. David Blodgett, who is now the Southwest Utah Public Health Department director, was a key figure in the efforts to gather signatures. Leavitt said a committee of leaders from around the valley worked hard to obtain signatures from property owners in the District boundaries.

He said the process of forming the District involved first working with municipalities and people from various areas in the county to determine the potential District’s boundaries. Then, signatures of the majority of property owners in the boundaries had to be obtained.

It was not possible then to do a “data dump,” so the records had to be obtained from the county, property owners had to be identified and contacted, and signatures had to be gathered. That made for a lot of letters explaining the need for a District and a lot of mail to address.

Leavitt said the first time they took the petition to Judge J. Philip Eves, one of the objectors pointed out that many of the signature pages only had one signature, when the properties were jointly owned by a married couple or by multiple people.

Eves agreed that the petitioners should get the additional signatures, so after a second round of work, they had about 9,000 signed petitions and Eves issued an order forming the District in

1997. The county commission then exercised its authority to appoint a District Board. There were approximately 14,000 parcels in the city at the time.

“Since then I’ve been very pleased to watch the CICWCD very responsibly move forward the interests of having efficient water and making sure that it is wisely allocated and distributed,” Leavitt said.

Paul Monroe, District General Manager, said he is grateful for the foresight Leavitt and other committee members and leaders had in getting the District established. Water is a geographical issue larger than what each municipality in the Cedar Valley can manage on its own.

“It is crucial to have an entity that works to establish solutions and ensure water for the future of the entire basin,” Monroe said.

Leavitt said the most important thing the District is doing is working to import water from Pine Valley in the West Desert, and he urged ongoing and increased cooperation between the District and the municipal and county governments.

“It’s critical because our aquifer has been mined over the past hundred years at rates that depleted it,” Leavitt said. “We are going to have to reduce the volume of water within our aquifers that is being used. The state has issued its orders that that will happen over the (coming) years. It’s critical for that to happen for the long-term benefit for the community and the environment.”

He added that to sustain our way of life we must find new sources of water and conserve the water we have, using it wisely.

“Those efforts are appropriate efforts to be coordinated by the District and by the municipalities that work with the District,” he said.

Leavitt said he grew up listening to water conversations at his grandparents’ homes and in his own home. His paternal grandfather, Vincen Leavitt, worked with others to replace the Bunkerville, Nev. area’s ditches and cisterns with a pipeline from the Bunkerville Mountains and an expanded system.

“He was deeply involved in that and I always appreciated his contribution to help people in that area that is even drier than here get the water they needed,” Leavitt said.

His maternal grandfather, Melvin Okerlund of Loa, Utah, would have water meetings in his living room, where he would help people work out problems as they discussed how to get adequate water.

“It was always very colorful. I would sit along the wall where I wasn’t in view of the participants, but I could hear the discussion,” Leavitt said. “I was able to quickly get a sense of how important water was to the life and livelihood of my grandfather.”

He said he watched his father through his years of public service in Iron and Washington Counties and was “certainly aware of the importance of having an organizing force in water development.”

When he was studying for his law degree, with a focus on business, he took the one water law class that was offered and has since had involvement in the water rights tied to his family’s business.

“We were very much aware in family discussions about how important water was to our daily life and building a prosperous community,” he 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. To Get to Know Your H2O, visit <https://cicwcd.org/>.

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DISTRICT